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The Socialism of Fools

Shane Burley¹

As a personal discussion on the topic of anti-Semitism, this article brings together the common issues that lead to the conceptual complexity of anti-Semitism. The breach of anti-Semitism into public politics and the organized left through the two-axis points of Israel and conspiracy theories are discussed, in particular recent controversies in the Labour Party, attacks on religious centers, and discordant views on what qualifies as anti-Semitism. Weaving together personal narratives, the essay unpacks the difficulty of considering anti-Semitism in the contemporary understanding of oppression, colonialism, and white supremacy. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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I did not think about organizing on a college campus until I attended graduate school. I felt some disdain for the politics of the campus, disconnected from the larger community and treated as its own constellation. But, as many people have pointed out, the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where I attended, was well placed to make an impact on global affairs because of the heavy investment of national defense organizations in the school. This was why we formed RIT for Palestine, a chapter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel movement.

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The goal of BDS is simple and straightforward: By boycotting Israeli goods, asking for organizations to divest in Israel and for the U.S. to issue sanctions on Israel, we can force the country to answer for its crimes against Palestinians, which are numerous and egregious. This was in 2010, shortly after the Gaza War and various solidarity caravans that were making their way to Palestine, either through the Rafah border or off the coast. The second caravan, the boat called the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that tried to gain access to the strip by sea arrival, had recently been attacked by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and nine people were killed in a highly publicized atrocity. BDS was an easy sell, Israel was engaged in war crimes and turning Gaza into an open air prison with almost no access to resources.

BDS as a national campaign had a huge investment from the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which at the time was the largest revolutionary socialist organization in the country. It was not uncommon to see the ISO flood other organizations, turning them close to “front groups,” since they had large-scale coordination and often sent in their members to social movements, they thought were worthwhile and that they could have sway in.

It was with the ISO, who had a dominant presence in RIT for Palestine, that a certain discomfort started to form. Two members had recently returned from Gaza, and in presentations made comments like, “If the only Jews you saw were holding guns, you might hate Jews too,” with regards to antisemitism in the region. The local branch leader explained to me that the Holocaust was not a particularly significant event, as genocides go, and that we should not think of it as anything more significant than any wartime atrocity. “The belief that Israel must exist is actually the belief that antisemitism is inescapable,” going on to explain how, if you think about it, Israel helps to create and maintain antisemitism rather than act as a solution to it. It should go without saying that this logic would not gain common currency when discussing any other form of bigotry or oppression.

But what really shifted things in the organization was how we interpreted the boycott portion. While our campus had a heavy number of student employees working on defense contracts, such as programming military drones, we chose to focus on Sabra Hummus. This was largely because it was easy to explain to people, it was a high profile Israeli company (with a Jewish sounding name) that we told people was named after a massacre of Palestinians (which is untrue). This was fine by all of us since we were set on boycotting Israeli goods, despite objections from people like Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein about the appearance

of boycotts on goods made almost exclusively by Jews.² But when we thought about how to expand the boycott, several members of the ISO started researching what Israeli products shops sold on campus. They came back with a list of kosher goods, which they said could determine boycott targets. Many of us voiced a discomfort with this approach, which inherently correlated Jewishness with Israel and crimes against Palestinian, but this was quickly dismissed. If kosher goods are the target, not just landmark Israeli products involved with the settlements, then how we understand Israel and Zionism is rooted in something other than the politics of the region: it is rooted in Jewishness.

A portion of us left the project quietly at the end of the year. We certainly were not going to be heard inside the organization, and the ISO determined the course of the campaign by that point anyway.

The issue was not that the people involved were vocal antisemites, in fact they often worked with local Jewish organizations and joined protests of far-right antisemites. But what took place in this political space lacked a critical eye about how antisemitism functioned, how to understand its shifting character, its effect on Jews, and on the level of its persistence and importance. People like Norman Finkelstein, with his comments about Jewish opulence and success, were lionized: this was the way to think about antisemitism, something only present in synagogue burnings but not in the rest of social life.

The missives and missteps moved from casual bigotry to politically programmatic problems. Instead of seeing antisemitism as a viable threat to Jews, organizers viewed accusations only as a cynical ploy from right-wing politicians in defense of Israeli imperialism.

THE JEWISH QUESTION

Viennese politician Ferdinand Kronawetter termed antisemitism the ‘socialism of fools,’ a term that was intended to capture the quasi-left-wing character of some forms of antisemitism. While we assume antisemitism to be a far-right notion, it has been captured by some on the left because of the way it fits into leftist narratives about imperialism, capitalism, and social coercion. Jews, or projects associated with Jews such as Zionism, are placed as active agents in the despicable systems of Western statism and capitalism, usually in ways that are contradictory. Jews undermine

² Jordan Michael Smith, "An Unpopular Man, *The New Republic*, July 7th, 2015, newrepublic.com/article/122257/unpopular-man-norman-finkelstein-comes-out-against-bds-movement.; Dave Markland, "Chomsky on BDS: a transcript," *Znet*, July 4th, 2017, zcomm.org/zblogs/chomsky-on-bds-a-transcript/.

working people through their perceived role in “finance capital,” or they are imperialists because of Israel, or they are part of the American war machine because of neoconservatism. The ‘socialism of fools’ is the process where the socialist politicians refuse to see the targeted issues as fully systemic and instead focuses on specific actors, often Jews or roles and labels commonly associated with Jews, and thereby port over traditional antisemitic bigotries in the name of a liberatory politics.

While I would argue that all antisemitism is a far-right delusion, there are two areas where antisemitism manifests: the political right and the political left.

On the right, the antisemitism operates largely as you would expect it to. Jews are a racial and religious outsider to Western nations; they are associated with degeneracy and the undermining of national identity since they can protect themselves by destabilizing Western man.³

The way that the right explains how Jews function is, by and large, the same as that of antisemitic areas of the left. There are two particular fulcrums where this dynamic can exist:

A. Conspiracy Theories

B. Anti-Zionism

The conspiracy theory is often the most obvious, since it functions by finding particulars instead of systems, which, in its explicit form, labels Jews as the malicious figures likely responsible for throwing our otherwise potentially-neutral social systems (such as the Federal Reserve or investment banks) out of whack. When these are deracialized, they tend to consist of the same logic (which is both incorrect and built to blame a marginalized group), or they are filled with dog whistle caricatures that serve the same effect.⁴

The second of these presents a bigger problem because many readers of this on the left will likely have said to themselves, “But opposition to Israel isn’t inherently antisemitic!” And they would be absolutely correct. Even the most vehement opposition to Israeli policy, or perhaps even opposition

³ Contemporarily, this is best exemplified by the work of former evolutionary psychologist Kevin MacDonald, whose work on Jews as a “group evolutionary strategy” has synthesized an entire history of antisemitism into a common academic-appearing narrative. Kevin MacDonald, *A People Who Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy, with Diaspora Peoples* (iUniverse, 2002).

⁴ I address this issue in my book review for *Producers, Patriots, Parasites*: Shane Burley, “Google Jewish Bankers: A Review of *Producers, Patriots, Parasites*,” *The Journal of Social Justice*, Vol. 9.

to the existence of Israel itself as we understand it today, is not inherently antisemitic. But the knee-jerk reaction to these statements, the hundreds of articles published in the last few years restating the obvious, belies the problem. Anti-Zionism is not inherently antisemitic (no serious person actually believes it is), but the way in which anti-Zionism often plays out, the types of strategies it utilizes, the language it is comprised of, and the way it can place double standards on Jews, can certainly be.

Because antisemitism is often difficult to see, and because it underlies political narratives that are often commonplace in circles of critique, it can be difficult to identify. "The term carries a heavy emotional charge. It is hard to find anyone these days whom one could describe, however objectively, as an 'antisemite' without insulting him; and, obversely, it is not easy for anyone to report having been subjected to an 'antisemitic' action without being suspected of paranoid tendencies," said Ben Halpern in 1981, seeing antisemitism as both ever present and seemingly impossible to pin down.⁵

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith tries to make it incredibly simple.⁶ "The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews."⁷

Jews are then ascribed something extraordinary, something that surpasses conventional human dynamics, either religiously or ethnically (or both), which allows them to be pernicious, not by choice, but by origin.

"Jews are not only partially but totally bad by nature, that is, their bad traits are incorrigible. Because of this bad nature: (1) Jews have to be seen not as individuals but as a collective. (2) Jews remain essentially alien in the surrounding societies. (3) Jews bring disaster on their 'host societies' or on the whole world, they are doing it secretly, therefore the anti-Semites feel obliged to unmask the conspiratorial, bad Jewish character," said Dietz Bering, carving out a definition of how antisemitism, or more appropriately "Jew Hatred," is applied diversely and even against incorrect assumptions about how antisemitism is defined.⁸

This seems, on one level, completely common sense, yet on the other it

⁵ Ben Halpern. "What Is Antisemitism?" *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 3 (1981): 251.

⁶ Some at the ADL have included anti-Israel politics as an example of their subsequent definition, which further confuses the issue for many.

⁷ "Anti-Semitism," *Anti-Defamation League*, <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>.

⁸ Avner Falk (2008). *Anti-Semitism: A History and Psychoanalysis of Contemporary Hatred*. (Westport, CT: Praeger), 5.

still feels ephemeral. Xenophobia and white supremacy are baked into contemporary society, so it is no surprise that antisemitism is a component of that. But the question is, why does it proliferate in areas where racism should be under attack? Why does it exist in ways that feel less simple to unpack?

ANTISEMITISM IS DIFFERENT

Antisemitism works in fundamentally different ways than other forms of racism, even if there are commonalities. It relies on complex narratives about secret allegiances – a people who are (too) smart, and because of their covert intentions are able to undermine some of our most coveted values and institutions.

This works differently than the stories that undergirded white working class support for slavery, which demonized people of African descent with narratives of sub-humanness. It even works different than the maintaining myths of settler colonialism, that gave the right to an expanded white empire whose greatness justified its atrocities. With both of those narratives, which helped to build white supremacy and continue to motivate our stratified and oppressive society, the non-white person is othered by attacking their dignity and robbing them of identity, agency, and full personhood.

With Jews a different, parallel form of demonic othering took place, one that does not question intelligence or cognizance, but instead sees Jews as uniquely pernicious in other ways. Black people were labeled as incapable of Western Civilization, and Jews are ascribed as agents of its intentional destruction. This should not be an indication of antisemitism's significance in comparison, since Western societies are fundamentally built on anti-blackness and anti-indigenous forms of white supremacy, but it does outline the fractured way that antisemitism has evolved into its own unique form of bigotry and systemic bias.

But this story continues. It is one of a discrimination, pogromist violence, total erasure from history, and the disavowal of full Jewish participation, even within the organs of social liberation (the left). Like any community systemically pushed by white supremacy, Jews continue to quest for actualization, never quite achieving what was promised. The world continues to distrust Jews, and this distrust is only magnified by a left that is unsure of antisemitism, both as bias and as rage.

IT'S FRIGHTENING TO BE JEWISH

One of the most persistent archetypes of modern Western countries is

the synagogue shooting. It is important to distinguish the synagogue shooting with a “the” to give it an official title: it is almost a Jungian archetype in its persistence. For decades now, white supremacists and those fixated on Jew hatred have maintained a common pattern – angst that usually forms as a response to the failure of their organizing strategies. This angst leads them to explode with rage and attack a group identity they feel “pulls the strings” of the social forces they obsess over.⁹ This has often led them to the Synagogue, an institution that is foundational to all things Jewish and therefore a seat of Jewish power in the mind of an antisemite.

On October 7th, 2018, I was planning on going to synagogue. I am of Jewish descent, which is to say my father is ethnically Jewish and my mother is not, and I was raised with very little Judaism.¹⁰ (My parents were, effectively, Christian.) But now that both of my parents are dead and I am looking to establish familial traditions with my wife, I wanted to stake out roots at a local synagogue. My thought was, with the coming National Refugee Shabbat, I could establish some connection with a synagogue and then attend for that event, which was a nice use of religious institutions to support refugees. This is particularly important as Islamophobic narratives persist around Syrian refugees and the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe.

That is when I heard that someone had stormed the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, gunning down eleven people in the worst mass shooting at a Jewish location in U.S. history. My wife and I then discussed whether or not we should actually attend a synagogue at all, and she mentioned that it might be time to get our concealed carry permits, since it may be a bad idea to enter into a synagogue without carrying a compact handgun. I still haven’t been to synagogue.

The shooting was a shock, but it wasn’t a surprise. This was the latest attack in a string of frustrated attacks, from sniper strikes at Jewish community centers to murder at the National Holocaust Museum. Jewish organizations are seen as centers of the Jewish cabal, a secret nation that controls the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG).

This came at a time when Jews were negotiating whether or not to be public. It is dangerous to walk around many European cities wearing a Kippah, but it is also increasingly frightening to simply be an “out” Jew

⁹ Shane Burley, “A History of Violence,” *Commune*, December 23, 2018, <https://communemag.com/a-history-of-violence/>.

¹⁰ I use the term “of Jewish descent” to distinguish Jewish ethnicity and people who practice Judaism, which I just use the term “Jewish.” If I chose to practice Judaism (Which, at this point, would require study and practice akin to conversion) I would then use Jewish rather than “of Jewish descent.”

anywhere visible. For journalists and artists on social media (i.e. Twitter) this has become the fervent mission of racists, identifying “the Jew” with echo parenthesis and forcing Jews to respond, either by outing themselves or refusing to accept the label.¹¹ In the weeks after the Tree of Life, I thought about writing an op-ed considering what it meant to be a person of Jewish descent, particularly as someone who was not uniquely raised as a Jew, in an era where it felt like our identity has to be defined by the fear of assault. My wife, again, reminded me that if I was going to publish something about being Jewish, maybe we should bring one of our guns from the garage into the house. It reminded me of a woman I knew who had converted to Judaism when marrying a man with a particularly orthodox family. Before she completed the process, the Rabbi brought her into a room to tell her that when Hitler began the process of rounding up the Jews, he also brought the converts with them, and their children. I now feel like I lied to my wife by not revealing my Jewishness sooner and what the consequences of it could be. The guns are now in our house, not the garage.

IT’S NOT ANTISEMITIC TO CRITICIZE ISRAEL

These are flashpoints, and they are obvious. When I get a message on social media accusing me of “standing on the shoulders of the Jews that came before,” no one would argue that the Groyper Twitter account that DM’d me was an antisemite. But this plays out in subtler ways as well, and consistently without interruption.

There was recently a slew of articles with the same line in them: It’s not antisemitic to criticize Israel. And, of course, I agree. There is a cottage industry of right-wing Israeli nationalist organizations, such as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), that accuse people of antisemitism for fair criticism of Israeli policy.¹² Make no mistake about it: I think Israel is a nationalist state formed partially through colonialism and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and its exclusionary political structures and current right-wing politics, is clearly a problem. Those more supportive of Israel tell me that, if I don’t support Israel, I must harbor equal opposition to all other forms of nationalist liberation movements. I respond honestly:

¹¹ Matthew Yhlesias, "The (((echo))), explained," Vox, June 6, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/6/11860796/echo-explained-parentheses-twitter>.

¹² Mairav Zonszein, "How the Right Has Tried to Rebrand Anti-Semitism," *The New York Review of Books*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/09/04/how-the-right-has-tried-to-rebrand-anti-semitism/>.

I am, and Israel does not form an exception to my politics. (I then offer the vastly unpopular “No State Solution.”)

So, what is the issue with pointing out that criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic? The absolute persistence of this line, a straw man response to an argument no one should have taken seriously in the first place, underskirts a larger issue. When it is about Jews (or perceived to be about Jews), no cost is spared in telling them how wrong they are. When Congresswoman Ilhan Omar made an ill-phrased comment about the Israel Lobby, people decried it as antisemitic.¹³ She apologized, and everyone should have moved on, yet a certain talking point persisted. It was as if pointing out that she said something with antisemitic connotations fostered an erasure of fair criticisms of Israel, the oppression she faces as an Islamic Somali immigrant woman, and the assault she is facing from the right. But we can, and should, look at it differently. Multiple things can be true simultaneously – that the attack on her was disingenuous in some corners, accurate in others, and even if she said something questionable, she still deserves our forgiveness, support, and protection.¹⁴

But that is not the conversation we had. Instead we discussed the outrageousness of daring to suggest antisemitism exists in discussions about Israel. In many of our discussions about Israel, antisemitism is only examined as a diversionary claim in defense of Israeli atrocities, never as a sincere and accurate description. And when discussing an oppressive nationalist regime like Israel there can still be antisemitism, just as when Islamophobia clearly plays into condemnations of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The strongest indicators that antisemitism persists comes from our inability to see antisemitism, to do the work of unpacking it, and to listen to Jews when they suffer it.¹⁵

¹³ Victoria Albert, "Rep. Ilhan Omar Criticized for 'Anti-Semitic' Tweet," *The Daily Beast*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/rep-ilhan-omar-criticized-for-anti-semitic-tweet>.

¹⁴ It really should go without saying that Omar's treatment around her tweet was also deeply Islamophobic and xenophobic, and part of the uncharitable response is from the perception of Islamic antisemitism. The tweet still used an antisemitic narrative, but the response was also motivated with bigotry. Lived oppression happens in multiple places at multiple times, the oppressed can act oppressive as well, and the marginalized have the capacity to marginalize others. This requires a clear headed and principled stance to address, and we should never let one person's use of an antisemitic narrative erase the fact that they are facing a full front racist assault from the right.

¹⁵ *Jacobin* went on a particular tear in 2019 after questions about Omar and the Labour Party, with headlines like "Ilhan Omar is Not Antisemitic," "No, Rashida Tlaib is Definitely Not Antisemitic," "How Labour Became 'Antisemitic'," "The Antisemitism Controversy," "The Never-Ending Story" (About how "nothing will ever be enough"

In 2009 there was a massive Equality March in Washington D.C. A friend of mine from upstate New York joined a caravan of busses rented by the International Socialist Organization (the same ISO branch as before) to attend. Once on the bus the conversation turned to Israel, which she was fine with since she had also done Palestinian support work. But the tone changed, and she slowly became quiet. "I became terrified," she told me afterwards. "They weren't just saying Israel or Likud, they were saying Jews. I thought that if they found out I was a Jew they might kick me out of the bus. Or demand that I answer their questions. I didn't know what to do."

I would give those people the benefit of the doubt that they would not want to be openly antisemitic (and they would even take measures not to be), but the narratives available for discussing their anger about the treatment of Palestinians remains caked with antisemitic caricatures, assertions, and conspiracy theories. In a way, the righteous rage about the treatment of Palestine creates a barrier to seeing and understanding antisemitism. In the same way as anyone might break their own rules in a state of rage (perhaps by calling someone an oppressive term that they would regret later) antisemitism becomes a form of transgressive rule breaking only allowed in response to the violence wrought on Palestine. This logic has been echoed in articles and books on the subject, that while antisemitism may exist, it is nothing when compared to what is faced by the Palestinians,

I will be the first to admit differentiating between real and disingenuous accusation of antisemitism can be confusing, particularly when some organizations have spent years battering Palestinian campus groups with accusations of antisemitism. Such brash and accusatory attitudes produce defensive organizational cultures that can provide antisemites with cover, hiding inside walls of cynicism by dismissing every claim as tantamount to the ideological rantings of Alan Dershowitz.¹⁶ As our situation spins out of control, the threat of antisemitism grows inside leftist spaces on the one hand, and accusations of antisemitism from bad faith actors on the right desensitize the left to even fair complaints.

A CYNICAL ATTACK THAT CAN BE TRUE

In November, 2019, Verso Books, the largest left-wing English

when they purged antisemites from the Labour Party), and, of course, "How Jacobin Became 'Antisemitic.'"

¹⁶ Who is a buffoon.

language publisher in the world, released a new book called *Antisemitism and the Labour Party* for free on their website.¹⁷ The book is an anthology written in response to the accusations of antisemitism that have mired the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn in recent months, particularly for issues relating to Palestine solidarity activism. “[A] story about the Labour Party that has no basis in fact, is prima facie absurd, and whose partisan motivations are transparent is playing a significant role in our national conversation and might even influence the results,” says editor Jamie Stern-Weiner on the first page of the introduction.¹⁸ When they say “influence the results,” they suggest that accusations of antisemitism stem from conspiratorial plots concocted by the right to cost the left seats.

It is a curious experience to write about the 'antisemitism' allegations against Labour, because there is barely anything of substance to engage with. A miniscule proportion of the party's half-million members were found to have posted offensive remarks on social media; so far as can be told, the entire furor reduces to this. Were it not for the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans would have continued to suffer the rigid segregation, harsh discrimination, and routine brutality of the Jim Crow South. Were it not for the 'Labour antisemitism' campaign, a small number of questionable Facebook posts would have received less publicity. Indeed, this book might fairly have been titled, *A Comprehensive and Exhaustive Examination of Nothing*.¹⁹

This is an inaccurate description of the claims of antisemitism, which have been outlined extensively and include Jeremy Corbyn's personal behavior and the dismissal of Jewish voices objecting to the prejudice.²⁰ Apparently, the hurt of Jews raising the issue should not only be rejected, but they should be mocked as well.

The book continues in this way, minimizing the role that antisemitism has played in Labour, and the left by proxy, reducing it to mere bad actors, misinterpretations, or “bad faith” readings by detractors. “Wild

¹⁷ This came after Verso, in an even more tasteless move, put literal testimonials from Jews on their website claiming the accusations of Labour antisemitism are wrong. “Testimonies: Labour Jews Speak Up,” *Verso*, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4511-testimonies-labour-jews-speak-up>.

¹⁸ Jamie Stern-Werner, “Introduction,” in *Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party*, ed. Jamie Stern-Weiner (London: Verso, 2019), xi.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, xii.

²⁰ “A guide to Labour Party anti-Semitism claims,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2019, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45030552.

exaggeration and bad faith attacks are the surest way to provoke knee-jerk dismissal by left-wing activists of all concerns about antisemitism – especially when those attacks come from pundits and politicians who are up to their necks in rancid bigotry,” says Daniel Finn.²¹ The point here is not that they are wrong about bad faith actors, but what is wrong is that the nefariousness of the right is then used to provide cover to a left that refuses to acknowledge the reality of antisemitism, as if the cynicism of your opponents gives you a pass for your own bigoted behavior.

The Verso book has salient points in it and does not let Labour completely off the hook, but the point is clear: Antisemitism in Labour is not the critical issue it has been made out to be, and we should take a look at the accusers. Labour is a critical part of the British left, and Corbyn’s ascendancy is akin to that of Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America in the U.S., so the accusations against Labour did have the very real ability to destabilize the gains they hoped to make. After the recent Tory victory there is no reason to believe that the issue of Labour antisemitism has been laid to rest.²² Labour’s failure remains less the fault of those addressing antisemitism than those who ignore it, and the best way to help Labour grow is to undo its contradictions and eradicate the antisemitism so the party can have a more consistent politic of liberation. Often, accusations of antisemitism are wrongly perceived as accusations of Nazism or deliberate maleficence. Instead, antisemitism can exist in subtler ways that go unchecked and become influential scripts of bigotry without the enactor’s conscious intention. A discussion of Labour antisemitism does not necessarily act as a disqualifying mark against the party, but ignoring obvious acts of antisemitism because of Labour’s fragility actuates antisemitism. (I still would likely have voted Labour if I chose to vote at all.)

THE BICAMERAL ANTISEMITISM OF THE LEFT

The two channels of antisemitism mentioned above (conspiracy theory and problematic forms of anti-Zionism) rest on unspoken understandings. The first channel relies on confusion regarding the exact nature of Israeli nationalism as an inherently Jewish phenomenon. The word Zionism itself has meant a number of things historically, but our understanding of it is

²¹ Daniel Finn, "Corbyn Under Fire," in *Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party*, ed. Jamie Stern-Weiner (London: Verso, 2019), 8.

²² And if history shows us anything, this will likely lead to increased anger over the accusations of antisemitism, claims that the accusations themselves were in part responsible for Labour’s epic loss.

now defined by sectors of Israeli politics typically understood on a range from right-wing to far-right.

For years prior to the foundation of the State of Israel, many definitions of Zionism existed that the right wing would consider anti-Zionist by today's standard. One form of Zionism envisioned the creation of a multiracial society in Palestine, where Jews enjoy recognition and support without eclipsing Muslim populations. Zionism may have a uniquely Jewish character, a dream for a Jewish place to be safe from antisemitism, but the Israel of today does not represent the logical conclusion of that idea. By assuming that "Jews" equals "Zionism" equals "Israel," activists adopt an inherently antisemitic script assigning an inherently Jewish character to the institutions of Israeli power that the left opposes, rather than understanding the capitalist and nationalist character of Israel as distinct from its perceived Jewishness. That the resulting State of Israel is the fault of Jews or, worse, Jewish influence through their ability to lobby, resolves to make the image of Israel that of Judaism rather than as an outpost of wretched politics and corporate interests.

The second channel for antisemitism in the left lies in conspiracy theory, in the fractured and dismal ways that the left tries to deal with a fragmented class analysis. Conspiracy theories often undergird a very real fact of political power: those who operate in the highest echelons of capital and the state form a class inclusive of corporate boards of directors, political positions, and what is often called "high society." However, the existence of an "upper class" remains institutional and public; the behavior of its members is often readily explainable by outlining the interests of particular actors and the way that these structures formed to maintain their position.

Conspiracy theory manifests a classic perversion of this general understanding away from a role in the system toward scapegoating specific people. It creates an inherently "class collaborationist" model in which a type of person, partially in and partially out of the ruling class, behaves as a foreign enemy, thereby calling members of all classes to unite in opposition to their pernicious influence. More than this, their motivations are more covert, money and power are not good enough reasons for the conspiracy theorists. Instead, a particular population of people (Who could it be?) use crypsis to hide themselves and inhabit even more profound spheres of influence.

The points at which we reconcile with these conspiracies are also common sense: In a mass movement, social struggles live or die by participation and you cannot control all the people who enter. In that way, there can be multiple versions of class struggle, some liberatory and some

less so. This was especially true in Occupy Wall Street, as the rhetorical singular focus on finance allowed antisemitic canards to gain currency within less ideologically-grounded areas of the movement. The same was true in the anti-globalization movement, where the issue for some became less the inequalities of neoliberalism and more the “globalist” ventures that undermined national borders.²³

From Labour to BDS to just about every left-wing publisher, there are moments when this type of rhetoric gains currency. This is certainly not a call to abandon the left, which has been infiltrated by both problematic forms of antisemitism, but to identify, purge, and inoculate.²⁴ We cannot dispense with every area of the left that has been marked with antisemitism because, like everything in a white supremacist society, racism is endemic and an infection that we are a long time from fully eradicating. But we can still engage in the fight, we can do so consciously, and we can come at it with the intention to do something about the problem rather than minimizing it. To do that we have to see the ongoing significance of antisemitism in its uniqueness and create an antiracist politic that has some teeth.

In this issue of the *Journal for Social Justice* I wanted to buck the trend of leftist minimization of antisemitism by putting it front and center. I immediately got paper proposals about the uses and abuses of antisemitism, not antisemitism proper. Misusing the term antisemitism (which, as I mentioned, does happen) has been well covered at this point, both in acceptable and clearly unacceptable ways. But my Call for Papers made no indication this was an issue about how antisemitism was being misapplied, and it was as if the left could only understand discussions of antisemitism through the dismissal of its existence. It should go without saying that the belief that the responsible discourse on antisemitism is purely discussing its non-existence is, inherently, antisemitic, but on this issue nothing can go without saying.

Eventually I got a stream of papers, a sign that many have been waiting for this to be addressed openly. The Frankfurt School, autonomism, and anarchism are well represented in the following pages, unpacking many of

²³ Simon Murdoch, "A Global Anti-Globalist Movement: The Alternative Right and Globalization," *Hope Not Hate*, September 28, 2019, hopenothate.com/2018/09/23/global-anti-globalist-movement-alternative-right-globalization.

these complex political issues. There are also political points I simply disagree with as well, political diversity that I chose not to control with a tightly guarded hegemony. That is to say that each other, including myself, only speaks for themselves, and should not be considered to speak for any of the other authors or the issue as a whole. This issue is not just my pontifications about the antisemitism of the world, but a range of voices with a diversity of backgrounds. There are provocative questions raised, and both the left and the right are called in on this question. (Though this journal is particularly leftist in orientation.) In theoretical, historical, and critical analysis, the idea of antisemitism as a complex system is unpacked, and while some of the authors offer answers, more questions still persist.

I named this article the Socialism of Fools because it is the most common phrase used across the articles in the journal. This looks at the way that real impulses towards liberation are shot off course by antisemitism; it confuses the way home. If your problem is capitalism, then conspiracy theory will fail you. If you want liberation from nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism, then blaming Jews will stop you from making your vision a reality. If we actually believe another world is possible, we owe it not just to Jews to fight antisemitism big and small, but to all of society as well.

As I began working on this, we entered 2019's Hanukkah season, which interweaves with the Christmas season that year. In that time New York's Jewish population, which is the largest population of Jews outside Israel, was laid with what could properly be called a siege as antisemitic attacks began occurring daily. Five people were stabbed in an attack at a rabbi's home during a Hanukkah celebration in Monsey, which was the thirteenth act of antisemitic violence in the preceding three weeks. Jewish communities were then discussing heading underground, hiding their celebrations as the threats became so pernicious that it felt like there was no hope.²⁵ Thankfully, there was a nearly positive response from the left to the attacks, without attempts at minimization, as a 'No Hate, No Fear' rally drew 25,000 people into the streets of New York City to fight against antisemitism and racism, with speakers calling for an open solidarity against Jew hatred.²⁶ Shortly afterward one of the attendees was accosted

²⁵ Deborah Lipstadt, "Jews Are Going Underground," *The Atlantic*, December 29, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/after-monsey-will-jews-go-underground/>.

²⁶ Deena Yellin and Alexi Shanes, "March against anti-Semitism draws estimated 25,000 to New York City streets: 'No Hate, No Fear'," *USA Today*, January 5th, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/01/05/no-hate-no-fear-new-york-city-march-anti-semitism/2818595001/>.

on the subway in an antisemitic attack, and the high we were on as people flooded the streets was shunted by reality.²⁷

We know why the right is antisemitic, they hate difference in the face of homogeneity. The left should see right through this, refuse to take the bait, and unite around how to deal with this. This remains particularly true as we confront the growing power of Wall Street and the crimes in Israel, not with conspiratorial deflections and defenses of problematic “allies,” but with principle. When we make common cause with bigots in the service of immediate ends, we undermine our larger struggle. When I was working as a part of the BDS movement, I felt it manifested my desire for a just and equal world, and the mistreatment of the Palestinians represented one piece of that general will. We cannot get to that final end of a just and equal world by compromising our core values. So instead we can build a more vital and capable politic that maintains a three-dimensional view of the world and sees oppression as the shapeshifting force it is.

-Shane Burley
January 2020

²⁷ Ewan Palmer, "Jewish Man Abused on New York Subway After Attending 'No Hate, No Fear' March Against Anti-Semitism," *Newsweek*, January 7th, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/new-york-jewish-attack-no-hate-march-subway-1480743>.

Looking Left at Antisemitism

Spencer Sunshine*

The question of antisemitism inside of the Left—referred to as “left antisemitism”—is a stubborn and persistent problem. And while the Right exaggerates both its depth and scope, the Left has repeatedly refused to face the issue. It is entangled in scandals about antisemitism at an increasing rate. On the Western Left, some antisemitism manifests in the form of conspiracy theories, but there is also a hegemonic refusal to acknowledge antisemitism’s existence and presence. This, in turn, is part of a larger refusal to deal with Jewish issues in general, or to engage with the Jewish community as a real entity.

Debates around left antisemitism have risen in tandem with the spread of anti-Zionism inside of the Left, especially since the Second Intifada. Anti-Zionism is not, by itself, antisemitism. One can call for the Right of Return, as well as dissolving Israel as a Jewish state, without being antisemitic. But there is a Venn diagram between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, and the overlap is both significant and has many shades of grey to it.

One of the main reasons the Left can’t acknowledge problems with antisemitism is that Jews persistently trouble categories, and the Left would have to rethink many things—including how it approaches anti-imperialism, nationalism of the oppressed, anti-Zionism, identity politics, populism, conspiracy theories, and critiques of finance capital—if it was to truly struggle with the question.

The Left understands that white supremacy isn’t just the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, but that it is part of the fabric of society, and there is no shortcut to unstitching it. Antisemitism is also woven into social relationships—having been part of Western society since at least the Middle Ages. But the Left doesn’t understand that. The problem is not just limited to the open and coded conspiracy theories about Jews and Jewish collectivities that circulate on the Left. It also can be seen in

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how the complex conflict in Israel/Palestine is compressed into a black-and-white portrayal, complete with the demonization of one party—and mixed with out-of-hand dismissals of the Jewish community's complaints about antisemitism.

Any acceptable approach must *start* with suppressing antisemitic conspiracy theories and refusing to uncritically back antisemitic groups—something that currently isn't happening. If the Left can't even get to first base, it is undoubtedly part of the rising tide of antisemitism we are seeing today. But dealing with this would mean far more than just taking these obvious actions, and the only way to work these issues out is to wrangle with them directly. The Left would do well to live up to its own values of opposing oppression by taking antisemitism in its own ranks seriously. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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PREFACE

Q: Why is this essay different from all other left antisemitism essays?
A: Coffee

A number of readers have asked me: Who is this written for? I suppose it's for people who know the ins-and-outs of the Left but have never engaged with the question of left antisemitism for various reasons and are curious to know the details and why it's such a persistent issue. It's for people who already are aware of the terrible conditions under which Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank live and are familiar with at least a very basic outline of the history of the conflict, such as what happened in 1947 and 1967, and the First and Second Intifadas. It's for people who, like myself, have no interest in the Zionist movement or its claims, but are interested in an anti-nationalist Left that acknowledges the need to reject antisemitism. This is also not written to discourage people from engaging in Palestine Solidarity work. Last, there is—as one reader said—a lot of insider baseball here; those unacquainted with the Left's “alphabet soup” might find themselves somewhat perplexed.

But this is not a primer laying out the different arguments about left antisemitism that have been developed over the past decades. That would be a worthy text, but a different one. There are many different critiques of

left antisemitism, some of which share very little in common with this piece.

This piece is a reconstruction of my own thinking as I worked through these questions about the Left and antisemitism. I gave special consideration to the question regarding whether contemporary leftist anti-Zionism has antisemitic elements. Astute readers will notice that many of my examples are from the period of 2005 to 2012, when I was most active in wrangling with this question while deeply involved in activist circles. While more current details could have been included, nothing has substantively changed regarding the questions.

As I say at the end, I hope that, if nothing else, this provides the reader with questions to consider—questions which themselves are a reflection of how Jews trouble so many categories and narratives in Western thought. One of my friends, who I have argued with for over a decade about the Left and racial nationalism, once told me, “Arguing with you is like drinking a strong cup of coffee.” If you’re outraged at my positions, intrigued by the questions, or aghast by the presence of left antisemitism after reading this, I will feel satisfied that this piece has served my purpose. Because I love coffee. Drink up!

But Before We Begin, A Story

There were a number of incidents that gave rise to my interest in what is called “left antisemitism,” but one stands out in my mind. Around 2005, I saw a well-known progressive musical project at a church that had long been associated with left-wing politics.¹ I went with my friend—let’s call him “Tom”—who had just finished running a Palestine Solidarity table near Manhattan’s Union Square. He introduced me to another guy he was with; let’s call him “Dick.” Chatting during the performance, Dick pointed his finger in a sweeping direction over the crowd. “Do you know what so-called religious—but really racial group—these people are from?” At first, I was confused—it just seemed like the typical lefty protest crowd to me—but then I understood what he was getting at; he thought they were all Jews. “You’re an antisemite!” I blurted out. Dick—who by now had turned beet red—jabbed his finger in my face, and screamed, “That’s what you all say when you’re confronted with the truth!”

I confronted Tom about why he had brought this individual to the event, and more so introduced me to him. Tom said he didn’t know Dick—he just had met him while he was tabling—but Tom also denied any responsibility for the incident. In fact, Tom told me, it was perfectly understandable that Dick hated Jews—because of Israel, of course. As I

was born and raised in the United States, I wasn't sure what that had to do with me, but I did understand that my soon-to-be-ex friend was perfectly comfortable with what had happened—and, in fact, was contemptuous that I complained. Dick's words were not the first time I had experienced this kind of open antisemitism; in fact, this incident did not involve threats of violence, which had marked the other experiences I'd had in the past. But it was the first time I had experienced someone on the Left baldly justifying antisemitism. And this was the just the first of many of these antisemitic experiences I would have in the future.

A. INTRODUCTION

Does the Left not recognize Jews as a group that can be persecuted or suffer oppression? Does it see “real antisemitism” as limited to neo-Nazi violence? And outside of that, is antisemitism seen as the loud complaints of an extremely privileged group over mild annoyances? I contend this is the case among the Anglophone Left today and is no doubt the case in many other countries as well. (See the notes for my definition of how “antisemitism,” the “Anglophone Left,” “Zionism,” and “anti-Zionism” are used in this essay.)²

No major Anglophone left-wing writers or organizations speak out against left antisemitism in a consistent manner—although a small minority of less-known ones do. I can think of many more who proclaim it's a “smear” rather than grapple with it as a problem. The closer one gets to a mainstream liberal perspective—that is, endorsing a two-state solution and being willing to openly recognize organizations like Hamas as antisemites—the more opposition to left antisemitism one will find. However, this viewpoint often condemns anti-Zionism and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as part of this. (The older *Dissent* crowd is the prime example of this, but they remain largely isolated from the larger Left.) And, of course, there are many on the right who decry left antisemitism—although their work is of varying degrees of worth.³

I became aware of the Left's positions on antisemitism during debates on the Left in 2005–2006, around the time that I had my run-in with Dick. This was the period of Hamas's rise to power in Gaza, as well as the Israel-Hezbollah War. I had heard the claims of left antisemitism before, which were kick-started by the 2001 Durban conference. This was a UN conference, with a parallel NGO gathering and protest march. Occurring soon after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the conference's original focus was changed from global racism to a condemnation of Israel, and

baldly pro-Nazi propaganda was circulated.⁴ Regarding this wave of antisemitism related to the Second Intifada, I had followed the “it’s a smear” line. Noam Chomsky took a leading role in promoting this “antisemitism denial,” saying, for example, “Antisemitism is no longer a problem, fortunately. It’s raised...because privileged people want to make sure they have total control, not just 98% control. That’s why antisemitism is becoming an issue.”⁵ While at the time I agreed with him, I came to completely change my mind about this.

Before then, I knew little about antisemitism other than in its most virulent form (from my direct experiences with neo-Nazi skinheads and Klan groups where I grew up in north Georgia), the history of the Israel/Palestine conflict, or the nuances of anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism. In fact, I had rather uncritically accepted the popular talking points of the boilerplate anti-Zionist talking points as part and parcel of a package of anti-globalization movement politics. (Between 2001 and 2004, I went to perhaps two anti-Zionist demonstrations, mostly because they were called by anti-globalization groups. At the time I did not, like many activists I was around, understand the debates about the Right of Return and related issues.)

In the years since, I have come to realize that many of the claims about the Left and antisemitism were actually true—even if their extent and depth were usually exaggerated. (After all, that’s what happens when only your enemy controls the narratives about your own flaws, which you refuse to face.) I also had a few rather unpleasant, openly antisemitic experiences directed at me individually, some of which involved political activists. I would have dismissed them, had they not been accompanied by a larger and louder chorus of acceptance and justification by my supposed “comrades,” some of which devolved into attacks on me for bringing up the issue.

It took me many years to come to understand that the Left’s refusal to own up to, and work against, antisemitism was actually a display of antisemitism itself. This included not just reflexively denying that antisemitism occurred within its ranks, but also the general tendency to refuse to acknowledge—or care—about antisemitism even when it occurred elsewhere, like the Far Right. Naturally, this meant that the Left did not incorporate a critique of antisemitism into its analysis. And since antisemitism was clearly present in the ranks of the Left, this meant that antisemitism was uncritically accepted, to a greater or lesser extent.

I also found that the Left holds inconsistent positions on identity and oppression, depending on the group. However, it was consistent in holding Jews to higher standards and being less likely to recognize antisemitism.

Antisemitism has many dynamics which are usually associated with psychological problems but are played out across society. It's important to note that the genocidal antisemitism of Hitler—including the racialized form it took—was actually an exception to antisemitism's past manifestations. While these did include pogroms where Jews were killed, there were also expulsions, job restrictions, designated areas where Jews could live, and severe limits on social and political rights. So, thinking that anything short of yellow stars and death camps isn't "real antisemitism" is to miss how it worked for at least a millennium before the Nazi rise to power, and therefore to dismiss it.

Like the other "isms," including racism and homophobia, antisemitism can act in a more subtle way that does not necessarily affect economic standing or inflict direct violence; nonetheless, it still adds up to a systemic oppression whose effects can be observed as a whole. The cycles of tolerance—attacks—tolerance that antisemitism has exhibited for centuries in Europe also should lead one to extreme caution in dismissing it as "over," especially considering that the Holocaust is within the lifetime of millions of people (including my own parents). Once we move away from the media outrage cycle, and into a bird's eye view of history, popular antisemitism in the West was neither very long ago, nor very far away.

The Jewish community has specific and extremely well-publicized stances about its concerns regarding antisemitism:

- * Don't deny that antisemitism exists.
- * Don't work with or support antisemitic groups.
- * Don't deny, minimize, relativize, or dismiss the Holocaust or antisemitism.
- * Don't use conspiracy theories whose agent is either "the Jews," Jewish collectivities or individuals, or common antisemitic codewords.
- * Don't litmus test Jews, or for positions on "Zionism," when your issue is unrelated to this.
- * Criticizing Israel as you would any other nation is fine. But demonizing it, including labeling Israel a "Nazi" state, is not.
- * Don't "single Israel out." Hold Israel to the same standard to which you hold other countries, and deal with Zionism the same way you treat other nationalist movements of oppressed people, especially regarding national self-determination.

At the least, these should be considered "best practices" for left activists to observe—if nothing else, to avoid being accused of antisemitism. It is

true that there is also the additional question of objections to BDS (which includes the fulfillment of the Right of Return), as well as open advocates of a One State Solution. And while certainly some actors, somewhere, are accused of antisemitism merely on the basis of these— in all of the scandals I am familiar with regarding left antisemitism, mere advocacy of BDS or anti-Zionism are not at issue. (Even the ADL says, “Not everyone who supports BDS is anti-Semitic and distinctions should be made.”⁶) These political positions are always combined with other things when the allegation of antisemitism is leveled. For example, Tamika Mallory, then a board member of the Women’s March, supported and promoted an antisemitic figure (Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan). Another board member, Linda Sarsour, made public a litmus test about Israel and Palestine, saying:

It just doesn’t make any sense for someone to say, ‘Is there room for people who support the state of Israel and do not criticize it in the movement?’ There can’t be in feminism. You either stand up for the rights of all women, including Palestinians, or none. There’s just no way around it.⁷

While this looks reasonable on the surface, she posed no litmus test for supporters of governments of Iran or Saudi Arabia, for example, which also reject full rights for women. And it would have been easy enough for her to say this: ‘There is no room in the movement for those who do not stand up for women no matter which governments they are repressed by— be it Israel or Saudi Arabia.’ But the litmus test is only for Jewish collectivities.

Overall, the ideological Left—excepting in Germany, where the movement has been split for years⁸—steadfastly refuses to listen to the Jewish community’s concerns, or even engage with the questions in good faith. It litmus tests people for Jewish issues, even when the topics at hand have nothing to do with it—for example, asking Jewish groups if they are anti-Zionist when working on an unrelated issue, such as opposition to the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. It is also very common for the Left to claim that people are being suppressed for “speaking out for Palestinians,” when in fact the person is being called out for using one of the specific narratives which has repeatedly been subject to objections.

Statements by Zahra Billoo, who was voted off the Women’s March board just days after she was elected to it (she had replaced Sarsour and Mallory, ironically), illustrate this. She was removed after old tweets of

hers came to light, which said “I’m more afraid of racist Zionists who support Apartheid Israel than of the mentally ill young people the #FBI recruits to join ISIS” and “Blaming Hamas for firing rockets at [Apartheid] Israel is like blaming a woman for punching her rapist.” Whether one thinks her statements are biased or not, neither justifying war crimes (the Hamas rockets targeted civilians), or labeling Israel “racist” and “apartheid,” are mere advocacy for Palestinian human rights. Billoo claims, meanwhile, that she is the victim of “an Islamophobic smear campaign” against “anyone else who dares speak out in support of Palestinian human rights and the right to self-determination.”⁹ The bait-and-switch is clear here: the Jewish community makes objections to specific framings—while she falsely claims that *any* supporters of Palestinian human rights are labeled as such. This kind of dishonest argumentation is standard fare in these debates. (Similar false claims are common on the pro-Israel side as well.)

The Left also tends to hold up unrepresentative groups of Jews as tokens on this issue. For example, it is common for Leftists to circulate pictures of the Jewish group Neturei Karta. This ultraorthodox Jewish sect dresses in identifiably Jewish clothing and hold signs with slogans such as “Authentic Jewry is Against Zionist Oppression.”¹⁰ But this tiny group is not just on the fringe, even compared to other Haredi anti-Zionists like Satmar Jews, but they even have a history of collaborating with Holocaust Deniers and fascists.¹¹ They are the Jewish equivalent of the Westboro Baptist Church.

Anti-Zionist Jews are more generally as used as tokens by non-Jew leftists to “prove” they are not antisemitic. While Jewish anti-Zionists certainly have every right to fully express their opinions, the number of Jews who seek to actively dismantle Israel as a Jewish state is likely a tiny part of the U.S. Jewish population. One pollster said “My recent review of the available data shows that about nine in 10 American Jews are more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians” and that “additionally, 95% of Jews have favorable views of Israel.”¹² For example, New York City has the largest Jewish population outside of Israel. But outside of the Haredi community like the Satmar—whose anti-Zionism are driven by religious, not political, concerns, and who do not boycott Israel—I have not been able to find a single synagogue that is explicitly anti-Zionist. This shows how few adherents anti-Zionism has among observant Jews.¹³

The Left would never hold up the 8% of black voters who supported Trump as representing the black community.¹⁴ In fact, when Trumpists put black supporters front and center, the Left understands their opinions are not those of the majority of black Americans. So, since the Jewish

community as a whole appears to not want Israel to be abolished, why does the Left hold up the tiny minority of anti-Zionist Jews as representative of the Jewish community? They are being used as tokens by the larger Left that refuses to engage in Jewish issues or to confront antisemitism. If the Left wants to “hold up Jewish opinion,” it should provide a platform for *all* Jewish views—not just cherry-pick those it prefers.

Many bystanders to these discussions interpret the term “Zionism” as referring to support for Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza. But this is not how either activists inside the anti-Zionist movement—or members the Jewish community—understand this term. Zionism means keeping Israel as a Jewish state—no matter in what borders. So when, as we commonly hear repeated on the Left, Zionism is fascism; and fascism is such a terrible thing that it should be opposed by force if necessary—then why doesn’t the Left just come out and say that it’s opposed to practically all Jewish communal organizations, almost all of which want Israel to continue to exist in some form? Mark Gardner points out that today’s left-wing anti-Zionist discourses actually mean that almost the entirety of the “mainstream Jewish communities (and their sympathizers) are condemned as reactionaries and apologists for oppression.”¹⁵

The Left accepts violence against fascists, so—following its logic—if Zionism is white supremacy, why aren’t leftists burning down synagogues and attacking most Jews? Lest readers think I am exaggerating, this actually happens in Europe, as both synagogues and Jews are frequently attacked during Israeli attacks on Gaza.¹⁶

Of course, in practice the Left doesn’t accept violence against Zionist Jews, and therefore recoils from its stated beliefs, is another question. But the logic of its argument remains.¹⁷ Either Zionism should be treated like any other form of white supremacist politic, or it should not be described this way at all.

The Left is so adamant about refusing to comply with fairly reasonable requests from the Jewish community’s communal organizations that it will let major projects implode, or be substantially harmed, rather than take even basic measures to address the problem. For example, I believe that the ongoing U.K. Labour Party scandal, claims relating to Occupy Wall Street, and fights over the Women’s March board of directors¹⁸ could all have been avoided if basic precautions—which would have immediately been implemented if the targeted groups involved Muslims, people of color, or LGBTQ+ people—had been taken. I have personally won more than one skeptical leftist over to my position after they witnessed the unwillingness of other leftists to address antisemitism seriously—even in blatant cases where Far Right speakers are using Left spaces.

I have been directly involved in combatting leftist apathy over the blatant presence of Far Right antisemites in progressive places not just once, but twice in the last decade. The first was when Tim Calvert, a longtime progressive activist in Portland, Oregon, started booking Far Right speakers at local venues. For example, he booked the antisemite Valdas Anelauskas at Laughing Horse Books, a left-wing bookstore, although the engagement was cancelled after an outcry. Despite it being clear that Calvert had embraced Far Right antisemitic conspiracy theories—his group even booked a Far Right activist with ties to the Army of God, a terrorist group that bombed abortion clinics—it took a four-year campaign to isolate him from the local progressive scene.¹⁹

The second was in Brooklyn in 2016 when Melissa Ennen, a 9/11 conspiracy theorist who owns a progressive space called the Brooklyn Commons, booked Christopher Bollyn. He is a Far Right writer who had been on staff at Willis Carto's *Barnes Review*—the primary vehicle for the spread of Holocaust Denial in the United States—as well as the *American Free Press*, which had previously been Carto's pro-Nazi newspaper *The Spotlight*. Despite protests, she refused to cancel the event.²⁰ She even publicly declared that she would welcome David Duke to speak there. Afterward, many leftists signed an open letter supporting Ennen and opposing a boycott—that is, koshering the platforming of Nazis.²¹

As previously mentioned, a group of other leftist activists and I became interested in left antisemitism starting in 2005. We started a reading circle that later morphed into an international discussion group. We had different backgrounds and came to different conclusions. For me, the exploration into left antisemitism, and then antisemitism more generally, has been a long journey that has at various times moved into deeper and deeper levels of understanding. In no way are what follows finished thoughts; but, after looking at this for well over a decade, I suppose it really is time to publish something.

Besides, it seems to me that antisemitism's resistance to a complete analysis—that is, the slippery nature of the subject—is actually part and parcel of antisemitism's function. Antisemitism is always changing. It is constantly developing new code words to hide itself. Antisemitism moves so fluidly between political ideologies and religions that it is more akin to something that dwells in the dark recesses of the mind, where fear and anxiety reside. This is why it sees Jews—or at least a subset of them—as a perpetual enemy. This may be related to modern antisemitism's emergence from medieval Christian antisemitism, when Jews were seen as representatives of Satan. Just as Satan always represented fears and anxieties about real problems in the world, so the projection of these

fears—which are, of course, always changing—are now laid on the shoulders of Jews.

At first, those of us in the reading group looked for examples of people attacking “the Jews” as such, or engaging in Holocaust Denial. We found some examples, but they were clearly people who lacked a basic understanding of the implications of uttering these words in public, and the detrimental effect they would have on their own interests. For example, Ramsey Kanaan, the founder of both AK Press and PM Press, in a description for his talk at the 2002 Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, wrote that he would speak about how “Judaism” was one of the things that was “Wrong with the American Anarchist Movement.” (Imagine the reaction if someone wrote a talk description today saying “Islam” was one of the problems with the Left!)²²

The Holocaust Deniers existed, too, especially the French ultra-Left Negationists who were at the root of the “Faurisson Scandal,” which is still talked about today.²³ But these examples were few and far between, and clearly not the center of the problem.

The participants in the study group looked at a half-dozen types of issues relating to the Left and antisemitism. They were the Left’s: use of coded and synecdochical antisemitic conspiracy theories; denialism about antisemitism; left-right crossover movements; support for openly antisemitic black nationalist and Islamist groups; and double standards about national self-determination.

B. THE FIRST SIX DIRECTIONS

1) The most obvious form of left antisemitism is the recycling of traditional antisemitic conspiracy theories but replacing “the Jews” with either a code word or synecdoche. (Synecdoche is when a part of something stands in for the whole.). These views are readily seen when listening to U.S. anti-Zionist discourses. Since 2000, many parts of the Left have, slowly, distanced themselves from these more obvious forms of anti-Semitic anti-Zionism. White Nationalist doyen David Duke deploys the easiest recognizable form of this dynamic, but the exact same anti-Semitic anti-Zionist arguments are commonly heard on Left platforms. A familiar example of this is the claim that the United States, or at least its foreign policy, is controlled by the “Zionist Lobby.”²⁴

Examples

The community using these arguments include what might be called the “Weir-Shamir-Atzmon Axis.” These are three crypto-antisemites who

have been openly circulated in the progressive world, appearing in supposedly leftist publications like *CounterPunch* in particular. Alison Weir, of the organization If Americans Knew, is famous for recycling antique antisemitism, for example, claiming that Zionists caused the United States to enter World War One.²⁵ In her early days, she openly said that *no* Jewish journalist could be trusted to speak on this issue. She was platformed by chapters of the Palestine Solidarity organization Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). It was only after many years of criticism that the organization finally broke links with her in 2015 (Another group did as well: USCEIO, the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation; it is now called the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights.). When JVP finally did break those ties, it was not because of her use of antisemitic narratives, but only because of her association with Far Right figures.²⁶ Even this caused internal dissension in the organization, with numerous JVP members, in particular, disagreeing with the national body about deplatforming her.²⁷ There have been numerous other instances of JVP's entanglement with antisemitism. The group circulated a Carlos Latuff cartoon that openly denies that anti-Zionism can be antisemitic; and, in 2006, prominent JVP member Judith Butler publicly proclaimed that "understanding Hamas, Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the Left, that are part of a global Left, is extremely important."²⁸ (Compare this to a July 2019 speech by senior Hamas official Fathi Hamad in which he called on Palestinians living outside the Occupied Territories to "attack every Jew possible in all the world and kill them."²⁹)

Israel Shamir, however, is the least circumspect of the three. According to *The Nation*'s Katha Pollitt, his website claims "'the Jews foisted capitalism, advertising and consumerism on harmonious and modest Christian Europe; were behind Stalin's famine in Ukraine; control the banks, the media and many governments; and that 'Palestine is not the ultimate goal of the Jews; the world is.'"³⁰ As early as 2001, some Palestine Solidarity activists denounced him, including Ali Abunimah, of *Electronic Intifada*, and Hussein Ibish, of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. But for years Shamir continued to gain access to progressive circles, was published in *CounterPunch* and was hired by Julian Assange to handle leaked Moscow cables for *Wikileaks*.³¹

Last, Gilad Atzmon, himself born an Israeli Jew, has made a career out of denouncing Judaism itself as the problem with Zionism. One open letter opposing him describes his ideology as making "no meaningful distinction to be made between Jews in general and Israeli atrocities. According to Atzmon, the latter are simply a manifestation of Jews' historic relationship to gentiles, an authentic expression of an essentially racist, immoral, and

anti-human ‘Jewish ideology.’.... Atzmon has specifically described Zionism not as a form of colonialism or settlerism, but as a uniquely evil ideology unlike anything else in human history.” He also likes to appear on White Nationalist media like *Counter-Currents*.³² But that hasn’t stopped Atzmon from being platformed by the UK Socialist Workers Party and *CounterPunch*; and prominent leftist publishing house Zer0 Books printed his book, *The Wandering Who*. In 2012, open letters denouncing him were circulated signed by the US Palestinian Community Network, and a separate, leftist one eventually hosted on the *Three Way Fight* blog.³³

An anti-Zionist politic that drew a clear line at the more egregious antisemites would exclude all three of these people. Instead, one can see that some people who sign one of these boycott letters may actually support one of the other three antisemites. One popular Palestine Solidarity blog, *Mondoweiss*, even hosted a debate on Weir after JVP denounced her. Of the three opinions, one saw Weir as antisemitic, one was neutral, and one was in favor of her. To me, this range of opinion seems representative of the Western Palestine Solidarity movement as a whole—one-third against using antisemitic ideas, as long as they are least thinly veiled, to criticize Israel; one neutral on the subject; and one actually in favor of it being included. The last opinion says, “JVP and USCEIO should stop... Their divisive attacks are harming the Palestine solidarity movement and harming the reputations of JVP and USCEIO.” So apparently breaking links with the more obvious antisemites is not just ‘harming the Palestine solidarity movement’—but damaging the reputations of the groups who actively separate themselves from antisemites!³⁴

2) Refusal to take the question of antisemitism as valid, and the use of a variety of techniques to either try to dismiss the question, or to attack the speaker. In some cases, blatant and open antisemitism was considered acceptable.

Examples

The anti-Zionist activist Michael Neumann did not deny the reality of antisemitism but rather justified it in the well-known anthology *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, co-published by the anarchist AK Press and *CounterPunch*, the latter of which has published antisemitic writers for many years. In the anthology’s lead essay he writes, “Some of this hatred [against Jews] is racist, some isn’t, but who cares? Why should we pay any attention to this issue at all?”³⁵ His correspondence with an openly antisemitic website, the *Jewish Tribal Review*, was later published; in the exchange, Neumann said, “If an effective strategy means that some truths

about the Jews don't come to light, I don't care. If an effective strategy means encouraging reasonable anti-Semitism, or reasonable hostility to Jews, I also don't care. If it means encouraging vicious racist anti-Semitism, or the destruction of the state of Israel, I still don't care."³⁶ (Bizarrely, Neumann is the son of Frankfurt School member Franz Neumann, author of *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*. I certainly assume his dad is turning in his grave.)

Upping the Anti, a semi-anarchist, late-period anti-globalization movement journal focusing on anti-imperialism, hosted a debate about left antisemitism in 2009. Michael Staudenmaier, then-associated with the antifascist milieu, argued that antisemitism was not okay, while *Left Turn* editor Rami El-Amin argued that antisemitism was not an issue, even citing *The Politics of Antisemitism* to back up his claim. The debate—which sprawled through important platforms for the antifascist movement—split the circles I was in.³⁷

It would be unthinkable for a Left publication to have such a debate about whether racism, homophobia, or patriarchy were acceptable or not. But this was an accurate representation of the Left of the moment: whether it should openly include antisemitism in its ranks was up for debate, and some people thought antisemitic viewpoints should be included. (Today, at least in the United States, there has been a crackdown on the more obvious expressions of antisemitism, along with an embrace of BDS. While that's an improvement, now it's more common for anti-Zionists to simply deny that antisemitism exists in their circles at all.)

These debates continue to roil the Left. In 2011 and 2012, Occupy Wall Street's refusal to expel antisemites from its gatherings, combined with the presence of conspiracy theorists, and interest in the movement by White Nationalist groups, created media criticism. In 2019, U.S. Congressional Representative Ilhan Omar's tweet—"It's all about the Benjamins baby," in reference to lobbying money, the U.S. Congress, and criticisms of Israel—created a huge scandal. And antisemitism in Britain's Labour Party—including Holocaust Denial—has been the source of many complaints, which broke into an open and ongoing scandal as well. This led to the unprecedented case of the lead rabbi in Britain to denounce Labour. Many accuse the party as trying to cover up, rather than deal with, the problem.³⁸

3) The study group members also looked at Left-Right crossover movements, especially Third Position fascism, which became a particular interest of mine. At least some of the antisemitism we saw in left circles was actually the result of cross-recruiting strategies by Third Positionists. (This is a special brand of fascism that is anti-capitalist and racial

separatist, and which traffics in coded antisemitic narratives. Third Positionists are keen to cross-recruit, or at least work with, leftists, and often use anti-Zionism as a point of entry.) One person who promoted these groups around 2001 is, today, a loud, local character in the NYC anti-Zionist milieu.³⁹ But in general, their influence was small. (The most popular version of this today is the influence of Russian “post-Third Positionist” Aleksandr Dugin; this can be seen in people like Caleb Maupin, who started out as more typical Communists.)

Third Positionism ended up being a less-important part of the left antisemitism puzzle than we first thought, and more of a worst-case end point. It served as an example of what a thoroughly “antisemitized” Left might look like: an alliance of Islamist, nationalist, and Stalinist regimes—including various racial separatisms, united by coded “anti-Zionist” antisemitism. Much to my relief, on the Left we found few people who actually held this kind of position. But we found the crossover went both ways; sometimes leftists moved into right-wing, antisemitic politics, often combining pieces of their former worldview with their new ideologies of bigotry.

Examples

I was looking closely at the National Anarchists around 2005. They were obviously a fascist group that embraced decentralization and were explicit about their “entyrism.” They claimed not to be antisemitic, but in fact, were just repeating long-standing antisemitic narratives that replaced “Jews” with “Zionists.” It took a while to get anarchist groups to deplatform them; but when it happened, it was because of their support of white separatism. I found that only a very small number of anarchists and leftists saw the National Anarchist’s coded antisemitism as a clear cut reason to exclude the group. (This was particularly troubling as their Bay Area affiliate attended an anarchist-organized Palestine Solidarity demonstration without being expelled.)

The National Anarchists were an outgrowth of the wave of Third Position fascism that was popular from the 1970s–1990s. I found that the remaining fragments of this movement were also coding their antisemitism as “anti-Zionism.” This included James Porrazzo’s New Resistance; he had led the American Front in the 1990s, another Third Positionist group who were formally affiliated with the National Anarchists in their prior incarnation as the National Revolutionary Faction.

We also saw people moving from the Left to Right. The White

Nationalist movement has no shortage of former leftists, many of whom retain a critique of capitalism and join the Third Positionist wing. A long book could be written about this type. A few examples include:

- * Otto Strasser, a leader in the NSDAP's "left-wing" before he was expelled by Hitler. He had previously been in the Social Democratic Party in Germany;
- * Oswald Mosley, the British fascist leader who also was a former socialist;
- * Lyndon LaRouche, who started in Trotskyism and then founded a crypto-antisemitic cult;
- * Horst Mahler, who a lawyer for the German New Left terrorist group the Red Army Faction, who later turned to neo-Nazism;
- * Two members of the IWW who held national office in the 1970s, Gary/John Jewel (who later joined White Aryan Resistance) and Perry "Red" Warthan (who visited Charles Manson in prison on behalf of *Siege* author James Mason);
- * Matthew Heimbach, who was a teenage socialist before forming the Traditionalist Worker Party;
- * Two U.S. earth or animal liberation activists, Christopher McIntosh and Nathan "Exile" Block, who, after serving prison sentences, made their allegiance to fascist politics clear;
- * Last, Mussolini started his political career as a leading member of the Italian Socialist Party and had anarchist and syndicalist sympathies, before founding the National Fascist Party.

And these examples do not include leftists who incorporated Holocaust Denial into their existing left-wing views. These include one of the founders of Holocaust Denial, Paul Rassinier, who had been involved in French Communist, socialist, and anarchist circles.

4) The fourth set of ideas was to look at how the Left used "incomplete" criticisms of capitalism. These ideas were not based on a systematic critique of capitalism—whether Marxist or otherwise; instead they attacked some parts of capitalism while letting others off the hook. These included:

- * Focusing on finance capital to the exclusion of other sectors, like attacks on central banks or "international bankers."
- * Treating complex systems by personifying them as either specific people or entities. This includes banking dynasties in general, and Jewish bankers specifically.

* Seeing specific countries as the personification of systemic functions like imperialism, while dismissing comparable actions by other countries.

Examples

Charles Coughlin, the famous antisemitic radio priest of the 1930s, was the classic instance of an attack on finance capital that then turned into open antisemitism. For years, he attacked the banks and called for a capitalism that downplayed the power of the finance industry. But in summer 1938, his rhetoric shifted from bankers in general to attacking “Jewish bankers” specifically.⁴⁰

Occupy Wall Street also personified capitalism in individuals, as the 1% and the “banksters.” The movement’s commitment to this perspective and refusal to create ideological boundaries—combined with the presence of antisemites and coded antisemites in their ranks, and various antisemitic groups praising the movement and seeking to engage with it in various ways—all created headaches for the protest movement. Its failure to respond adequately left it open to a huge range of criticisms.⁴¹

The personifications often take the forms of Jewish bankers. The Rothschild family have been a favorite since the nineteenth century, and recently George Soros has come into vogue as a personification of the problematic banking system.

Vulgar anti-imperialism in general sees individual countries as problems, as opposed to a systemic analysis of imperialism. Instead of a global system of exploitation being the trouble, it is the United States in particular that is the problem. In this view, the particular character of specific countries is seen as the root cause of the issue rather than larger system.

The most obvious example is a crude anti-imperialism that sees that whatever the United States does as “imperialism,” while comparable actions by countries like China and Russia are deemed irrelevant, or at least “not imperialist.” Israel is often credited with having a wildly outsized role in global politics, and it is frequently described as the “beachhead” of imperialism, and/or its lynch-pin. This justifies the immense attention paid to it, and it often descends into Israel being treated as the “international Jew”—where the traditional role of Jews as a scapegoat for economic or political problems has been shifted to Israel as the scapegoat, just cast on the international level.⁴² Just as antisemitism is called the “socialism of fools,” this kind of anti-Zionism has been dubbed the “anti-imperialism of idiots.”

5) We also looked at how many Western leftist groups supported—either directly or indirectly— Islamist antisemitic groups in the Middle East (especially Hamas and Hezbollah), as well as antisemitic black nationalists in the United States (such as the Nation of Islam and the New Black Panther Party).

Since the Left, and libertarian socialists, refuse to support, for example, Islamophobic or White Nationalist groups, why should we support groups that are antisemitic? Western anarchists were more willing to support certain Islamist movements in the Middle East than they were to support secular Communists! It was everything about Marxist-Leninism that I had abhorred, and why I had joined the libertarian socialist wing of the radical Left.

From my perspective, the U.S. anarchist movement had now come full circle. (In fact, I later realized that this pro-nationalist stance was a swinging pendulum, which went in and out of fashion. I had become involved in these circles when it was out of fashion, and now it had come raging back in, abetted by changes in the anarchist milieu itself post-Seattle.)

Examples

The Left has largely declared that the antisemitism of both secular and Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa is of no concern. As I have been repeatedly told, this kind of criticism is supposedly off-limits because “you have no right to tell oppressed people how to resist colonialism” and that “this is just a reaction to Zionism.” This extends to groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Fatah. How the Occupation leads one to believing that Zionism controls the world through the Rotary Clubs is beyond me, but apparently this makes sense to other people. (This is actually in the Hamas charter, their cornerstone ideological document.)

This carte blanche also exists in the United States, especially for Black and Muslim groups. This does not just include the antisemitism in the original Black Panther Party and from Malcolm X,⁴³ but actively extends today to include groups like the Nation of Islam and the New Black Panther Party. The explicitly antisemitic Louis Farrakhan has repeatedly been the center of scandals where progressives refuse to disassociate from him, including the years-long scandal over the Women’s March.⁴⁴

6) The sixth issue we looked at was the question of double standards, especially around questions of national self-determination. This starts to cut into the deep questions here: What are Jews? How does the Left treat oppressed groups? What does the doctrine of “national self-determination”

mean, and what is a “nation”—much less “self-determination”?

Examples

For example, the ideological socialist Left considers African-Americans a “nation,” and their nationalists who want to form a new, racial state are supported. So why are the same currents among Jewish nationalism opposed so strongly? For those of us who were deeply anti-nationalist, often rejecting the doctrine of “national self-determination” altogether, the tortured double standard regarding the Left’s continuing love affairs with both “black belt” Black nationalism and Indigenous revanchism—mixed with the Left’s wildly exaggerated take on the comparable doctrine of Zionism—was of particular note. (See below for a further elaboration on this question.)

C. FURTHER POINTS OF DEPARTURE

At this point, the people from the study group, with whom I went spelunking into the world of antisemitism, all went in different directions. The “double standards” question was one of the trickier ones, but it had to be understood to get at the crux of the matter. It was what allowed a doctrine to look unproblematic on the surface, even when each individual example is examined on its own. But when taken as a whole, the slant could be seen, because bias and selective application was consistently applied to Jews.

For example, the Left has no trouble seeing that people of color are locked up for drug crimes at much higher rates than white folks are, despite studies showing equal amounts of drug use among racial groups. The Left doesn’t challenge the guilt of individual people of color who are arrested, but can see that, taken together, the arrests add up to a racially based enforcement of drug laws. And this happens not just with drug laws, but with medical care, employment, housing, etc. Together, they add up to one part of a larger dynamic of systemic oppression. But when it comes to Jews, this same analysis that the Left can readily use for questions like race and gender is nowhere to be seen.

Since showing this requires a subtle and contextual approach, you have to look at lots of individual topics to see how the double standard played out. You have to look at not just how the Left approaches these issues, but how Jews historically related to them, and then compare how the Left treats non-Jews and Jews and see if it is consistent. Unsurprisingly, I concluded there was a pattern of systemic bias, and on top of that a pattern

of systematic *denial* of this bias. There was selective attention and selective outrage, with selective exceptions made.

This forced me to look at many different topics that I had previously ignored or had given only a cursory glance. And Jews, as it ended up, consistently caused a lot of trouble. In many cases they troubled the categories themselves—in addition to being subject to a host of double standards. Incorporating an understanding of Jewish history, and a critique of antisemitism, would frequently turn something that Left had cast as a cut-and-dried issue into a grey and nebulous morass.

I struggled for years over why the Left evaded this issue so much—even in fairly clear-cut situations involving Holocaust Denial on the Left or antisemitic activists on the Far Right. I finally decided that, in addition to being mesmerized by antisemitism into denying its existence—in the end the Left actually had concrete, logistical reasons to overlook antisemitism.

For the Left to seriously incorporate antisemitism into its analysis—to grant it the same gravity as it does racism or homophobia—would be to problematize both many of its theoretical frameworks as well as its practical alliances. To take antisemitism seriously would mean to have to rethink alliances with many groups, leaders, and parties; populist rhetoric about banks and the elites; and anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism in the specific forms the Left had come to accept as unquestionable dogmas.

It would mean:

- 1) Criticizing leftists for spreading coded antisemitic conspiracy theories, including the popular “Zionist Lobby” conspiracy theory, instead of making excuses for them. While Ilhan Omar did the right thing by apologizing for her tweets (and that should have been the end of it), many of her defenders insist not only that she was correct, but that it is racist to criticize Muslim women of color who express antisemitism. This is a clearly a pro-antisemitism formula.
- 2) Confronting the widespread circulation of conspiracy theories on the Left, including the fixation on the power of “lobbies.” Many people ask why some congressional lobbies can be criticized while the same narratives about the pro-Israel lobby are considered out-of-bounds. This should actually be a call to look at the extreme overemphasis that many progressives place on lobbies in general; the idea that Congressional votes are simply bought by powerful lobbies is itself a conspiracy theory that should be rejected.
- 3) Expanding the circle further out, the Left should be confronting and rejecting *all* conspiracy theories, as well as populist fixations on the “people” versus the “elites.” Antisemitic conspiracy theories have

such traction on the Left because they come in the context of a general circulation of conspiracy theories and other populist rhetoric—as opposed to a systemic analysis of how power works. Regardless of whether these frameworks are antisemitic or not—they are all *incorrect*.

4) Breaking existing links with Western antisemitic groups like the New Black Panther Party, Nation of Islam, and If Americans Knew, just as the Left would with Islamophobic groups. This should also extend to their supporters, apologists, and enablers.

5) Dealing with Palestinian and other regional political parties and movements with the same critical approach that we use in dealing with other political movements whose politics are riven with bigoted conspiracy theories.

6) Coming to terms with the presence of antisemitic elements in historical groups who are fetishized today. These include the Red Cells (Germany), the Black Panther Party (United States), and the PFLP (Palestine).

7) Rejecting the idea that one must “take the leadership” of an oppressed group that one does not belong to. This is another idea that creates a green light for antisemitism where it is present in the groups that are granted the “leadership.” This is especially important with groups in the West Bank and Gaza, such as Hamas, and including ranking members of Fatah.⁴⁵

8) Reconsidering notions of the “nation” and “national self-determination,” especially regarding their relationship to Jews.

9) Changing the “open model of organizing” promoted by figures like David Graeber and used by movements like Occupy Wall Street, which both allowed antisemites in and prevented people from booting them out.

10) Forcing the British Labour Party to tackle antisemitism directly, or breaking with it.

11) Having publishers like AK Press and Zer0 Books pulp their books that promote and justify antisemitism.

12) Isolating political groups and publications that support coded antisemitic conspiracy theories and publish the Weir-Shamir-Atzmon axis, including *CounterPunch* and *MintPress News*.

13) Last, but not least, fundamentally changing the Left’s stances and rhetoric in regard to the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

The Left loves to raise a flag, strike up a song, and march into battle—win or lose. This “glorious struggle against the system” worldview hates

complexity, ambiguity, and admitting that, in some conflicts, all sides are party to really fucked-up politics.

I often think the old Communist-newspaper-selling sect, who—as they are faced with each new political hotspot around the globe—does a quick study of it. They then announce the “correct line,” and elucidate their position and which groups they support and oppose. It’s very cut and dry.

But, especially for libertarian socialists, sometimes there is no faction that matches the political standards that your views are supposedly based on. Sometimes the situations are not what they seem at first glance. Sometimes only a little knowledge is a bad thing. Sometimes the Left picks the wrong faction to back, or backs it in the wrong way. And, in the worst case scenarios, leftists have been known to back groups that history has shown to have simply been mass murdering monsters, from Stalin to Pol Pot to the Derg.

These are some of the conclusions I came to after looking at this issue for many years. I am certainly not the first person to come to them after looking through the lens of antisemitism. I remember the sinking feeling I got when reading Steve Cohen’s *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Antisemitic*, a 1984 book about arguments in the UK Left during Israel’s invasion of Lebanon.⁴⁶ The dynamic he describes—about non-Zionists arguing with leftists about criticisms of Israel which were infused with antisemitism—could be repeated almost word-for-word when I first read it a decade ago, and again today.

One of the more depressing things we discovered was the Left’s own history of antisemitism—right down to Proudhon and Bakunin quotes that are so antisemitic that they are circulated on neo-Nazi forums.⁴⁷ (Proudhon’s ideas had so many problematic elements that he was promoted as a proto-fascist in Nazi Germany by writers like Willibald Schulze and Karl Heinz Bremer.⁴⁸)

The other depressing thing we found was the cycle of Jews discovering antisemitism on the Left, raising the issue, being shouted down, and subsequently leaving the Left altogether. I saw it happen myself more than once. And it is guaranteed to continue in the future.

Whether the Left is better or worse on antisemitism than it is on issues like race or misogyny, I cannot say. And, just as with Jews, there has historically been no shortage of people of color or feminists who have left the Left in disgust.

What I can say, however, is that the Left takes issues of race and gender seriously, and it struggles with them. (Which is not to say that the results aren’t always embarrassing, insufficient, or even unintentionally offensive. They sometimes are. But the Left tries—it wrings its hands,

rolls up its sleeves, and puts on some workshops, and publishes some pamphlets and blogs.) What I can say with certainty is that, with antisemitism, the Left does not do this in any sustained way.

But if the Left were to have a serious engagement with antisemitism, it would have to look at these topics I outline below, at least after it got beyond combating the blatant Jew-haters and Holocaust Deniers. White supremacy isn't just David Duke and Richard Spencer, it's part of the fabric of society, and there is no shortcut to unstitching it. And it is the same with antisemitism.

Below are just some of topics that I had to learn about, and grapple with, as I tried to understand why the Left looks at Jews the way it does today, how that view came to be historically, and what a genuinely anti-antisemitic Left politics would look like.

D. CHANGING THE LEFT BY TAKING ANTISEMITISM SERIOUSLY

1. Understanding the Special Features of Antisemitism

Some people treat antisemitism as a form of "racism." While it certainly can function that way—especially when Jews are seen as a biological race—overall it functions in such a different way that I find it unhelpful, and even misleading, to label it as a form of "racism." Antisemitism should be approached as its own "ism," just as questions of homophobia should be approached as different from questions of anti-black racism. In fact, in the United States today antisemitism probably acts more like the former than the latter. Like LGBTQ+ people, Jews can be simultaneously economically successful and targets of violence. Jews may also be treated as "normal" people until they are "outed," after which they are treated differently.

This is partly because antisemitism is tied up with various psychological mechanisms—including denial, anxiety, scapegoating, demonization, and attacking abstractions. It has a particular affinity for nationalists of various stripes, as Jews—and their synecdochical stand-ins—are the classic "other" to define their nation against. Antisemitism also functions as a "foreshortened critique of capitalism"—the "socialism of fools," a term used by late nineteenth-century Austrian social democrats—where they are attacked for their role in the economy as a scapegoat for the functioning of the ruling class in general and capitalism as a system. The scapegoating happens with Israel too, where it becomes, as mentioned, the "international Jew" for vulgar anti-imperialists.

The numerous UN resolutions passed against Israel, many by countries

with atrocious human rights records, testifies to this. Condemnation of Israel appears to be a means to distract their citizens from their own country's issues. This does not make Israel any less liable or guilty of violations it has committed, but it does show how antisemitism influences the way Israel is treated in the international arena. Israel simultaneously commits human rights abuses and is the target of antisemitism. The Left only recognizes the first part of this equation.

Antisemitism is also closely linked to a larger reaction against the emergence of secular, liberal society. This started with the counter-Reformation and continued with the counter-Enlightenment, as the same reaction the Catholic Church had against the Protestant Reformation was repurposed against the French Revolution and the expansion of liberalism across Europe. Jews become associated with cosmopolitanism, literacy, and abstraction. The later Nazi attacks on Jews are linked to internationalism (Antisemitic literature has long portrayed Jews as both international capitalists and Communist revolutionaries.) and "degenerate" avant-garde art. Jews are seen as subverting national autonomy, separating the people from the soil, and destroying traditional cultural beliefs. This also can be seen in the divide between financial and productive capital, the producerist narrative, and the attacks on "banksters."⁴⁹

This kind of antisemitism, especially in coded forms, is compatible with many different political ideologies and so can be found all over the ideological map. Antisemitism has worked its way into nationalisms of all kinds, into the Left and Right, "anti-civ"⁵⁰ and other critiques of modernity, into environmentalism, the union movement, and many others.

It should be noted that this kind of "ideological antisemitism" can exist either alongside or separate from a systemic oppression based on a consistent system of bias, litmus tests, and double standards. This is similar to how an ideological White Nationalism can function parallel to a less consistent, but equally as pernicious, unchecked deployment of white privilege.

2. Antisemitism and the Far Right

Even when antisemitism appears in other political currents, the Left has trouble seeing it. In particular, this can be seen in how it treats White Nationalism. Experts readily agree on the centrality of antisemitism to organized White Nationalist thinking; insofar as it has one, antisemitic conspiracy theories essentially act as the base theory of the movement. The Jewish Conspiracy is, ultimately, its explanatory mechanism for the

myriad problems of the world. But non-specialists on the Left downplay the centrality of antisemitism to White Nationalism, and sometimes ignore it entirely.

Considering the Left's interest in opposing the Far Right, this is a mistaken approach. In fact, when confronted with nationalist movements centered on people of color, Nazis have tried to make common cause with them on the basis of shared antisemitism. There are numerous examples of black and white separatists meeting up to discuss the possibility of collaboration initiatives. As I wrote in 2015:

In the 1930s, when Mississippi's arch-racist Senator Theodore Bilbo publicly called for the expulsion of African-Americans to Africa, members of Marcus Garvey's movement (themselves proponents of African-American emigration to Africa) approached Bilbo as a potential collaborator. The Nation of Islam (NOI) also has a history of associating with White nationalists, including the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party; Malcolm X cited these associations as one of the reasons he became disgruntled with NOI. [White Aryan Resistance leader] Tom Metzger has supported and donated money to NOI and has addressed the New Black Panther Party (NBPP). In Florida, one Black separatist organization [PAIN, the Pan African International Movement] even held joint demonstrations with a local Klan group.⁵¹

For example, the infamous Charlottesville rally in 2017 was extremely and openly antisemitic. Before the rally, one of the main participants, the Traditionalist Worker Party, made two things clear: they blamed Jews for the removal of Confederate statues, and they welcomed people of color to join their side at the rally.⁵² And a number did go. They included Enrique Tarrio, an Afro-Cuban who is currently the leader of the Proud Boys, an Alt Lite group based around street violence; Irvin Antillon, a member of the pro-Nazi Latino skinhead gang B49; and Alex Michael Ramos, of Puerto Rican descent, who received a six-year sentence for his part in the gang beating of DeAndre Harris, a black man, after the rally.⁵³

But, afterward, some of the Left cast the rally itself—and the Alt Right at large—as exclusively opposed to people of color. Later in 2018, Black Lives Matter Nashville told its members there was no need to support an anti-Nazi demonstration in Shelbyville, Kentucky because this was the responsibility of white people and was distracting from their struggles. While it is certainly understandable that a BLM group would feel it had other priorities, that approach (among many other things) ignores that

fascists hate feminists, LGBTQ people, and, of course, Jews.

Another Southern progressive group, SONG (Southerners on New Ground), noticeably omitted Jews in their “prayer...for our Southern kin” issued the day after Charlottesville. A group staffer has previously tried to tell me to stop criticizing a high-profile Left politician (Ajamu Baraka) who was being platformed by a Holocaust Denier, telling me that Baraka “has done more for the base than a lot of us AND would rather us put the majority of our righteous Jewish rage in contesting the Zionist backlash (being framed also as antisemitism) against the Movement for Black Lives policy platform.” What the backlash by liberal Zionists against the BDS endorsement had to do with associating with a Holocaust Denier was lost on me. But what was not lost was that Jews were clearly not part of SONG’s “Southern kin.”⁵⁴

In 2018, I was walking through San Francisco, and I spotted a sign in a store window. It said: “#Take Care of—Muslim, Black, Women, Queer, Latinx, Native, Immigrant, P.O.C., Trans, Disabled, L.G.B.T.Q.+, Low Income, Activist, Refugee, Undocumented, Incarcerated—Friends, Family & Community.” Jews couldn’t only not make the Top Sixteen, but they were even of less concern than a generic “activist.”

The Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), meanwhile, didn’t just ignore antisemitism on the Far Right, it actively denigrated antifascists of Jewish backgrounds who had been working against fascist activism for years, even as other anarchists ignored the rise of the White Nationalist movement. A 2017 IAS Call for Papers (CfP) said “the bulk of the writing and speaking on fascism and anti-fascism—the better-selling books, the high-profile interviews—are being done by white men.... And for that, we need to be hearing from more people than just white men.”⁵⁵ Those referred to as doing the “bulk of writing” are unnamed. The most obvious suspects who were “writing and speaking on fascism and anti-fascism” were myself, Alexander Reid-Ross, Shane Burley, Mark Bray, and Daryle Lamont Jenkins. Of the five, four are from Jewish family backgrounds, and the other is a black man whose views do not dovetail with the IAS (and so—unsurprisingly—was ignored as the “wrong” kind of person of color). Our backgrounds are not hidden either. For example, the IAS CfP is almost definitely referring to Bray, whose popular book *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*, is dedicated “To the Jews of Knyszyn, Poland,” who were obliterated in the Holocaust.⁵⁶ When I say the Left acts as if antisemitism doesn’t exist—even when it occurs in blatant forms on the Far Right—I am referring directly to perspectives like this IAS CfP.

In fact, in the United States it is consistently liberal centrists who are best on this issue. In the week after Charlottesville, articles on

antisemitism and the rally ran in the *New Republic*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Washington Post*.⁵⁷ The Left, or at least a chunk of it, only belatedly—and really, only after the October 2018 Pittsburgh massacre—finally got in line regarding White Nationalist antisemitism. The Pittsburgh massacre was, finally, the kind of antisemitism it could recognize—deadly, located somewhere else on the political spectrum, not entangled with issues about non-Jewish people of color, and easy to oppose without making any changes to its own belief system.

Antisemitism is also routinely ignored when addressing Islamist movements. For example, Osama bin Laden repeatedly made clear the importance of antisemitism for his politics. In an October 2002 open letter to the American people, where he explained the reason for Al Qaeda's strategy, he said "Your law is the law of the rich and wealthy, who hold sway in their political parties, and fund their election campaigns with their gifts. Behind then stand the Jews, who control your policies, media, and economy."⁵⁸ But antisemitism, as a pillar of these types of Islamist politics, is almost completely dismissed by the anglophone Left when it looks at Islamist movements.

The attacks in Paris in January 2015 also show this dynamic. Much digital ink has been spilled about Islamophobia and *Charlie Hebdo*, the satirical paper whose office was the target of the first attack. But two days later, in a related attack, an ISIS supporter killed four Jews in a Kosher supermarket. This second attack is usually either skimmed over or just ignored.

These attacks show how important antisemitism is as a political mobilizer, and how it influences the choice of targets by those influenced by it. But by ignoring antisemitism as a factor, the Left misreads and misunderstands the intentions of those for whom this is part of their ideology.

Antisemitism is also important for the non-White Nationalist sectors of Far Right, including groups that allow Jews as members like the Proud Boys, the John Birch Society, and the Patriot movement and militia groups. These groups rely heavily on coded and synecdochical antisemitism, and conspiracy theories derived from antisemitism. *Breitbart*, for example, uses a whole series of them—even while simultaneously supporting right-wing Zionism and accusing the Left of antisemitism.⁵⁹ Some conspiracy theories that can be heard from the mainstream Republicans—such as conspiracies about George Soros, "Cultural Marxism," "international bankers subverting our national autonomy," and the Federal Reserve—all are derived directly from antisemitic sources.

3. The History of Antisemitism, Jews, and Racial/National Identity

The U.S. Left does little educational work, of any kind, among its grassroots base. There is also almost no education about how antisemitism manifests in the larger society, outside of a narrow focus on the Holocaust—which was, as mentioned, an outlier of how antisemitism has historically functioned. This also ties into other questions, such as the history of Jews themselves—including their demographics and geographies, mixed as these are with a long history of expulsions and containments.⁶⁰

The modern history of antisemitism is closely tied to the West’s shift from Christian feudalism to secular liberal nation-states—a change mirrored in antisemitism (as accusations against Jews switch from being Christ-killers who slaughter Christian babies for cooking ingredients, to being international bankers who secretly rule the world), and the development of national and racial identities in Europe and the world. (It is here that Jews become the scapegoats for modernity’s problems).

This in turn cuts into the question of what Jewish identity is: Is it defined by religion, race, ethnicity (or multiple ethnicities), culture, or sensibilities? How does the Western notion of citizenship, nationality, race, and ethnicity develop and how do Jews fit into—or become an exception from—them?

Last, what does it mean to be white, and who is? Why do Jews (albeit alongside other groups), seem to go in and out of being “white,” depending on the time and place? Are Jews “white” in the U.S., but not in Europe? (And are other European minority groups with ancient origins elsewhere, like the Roma, “white”?) What does it mean to label Zionism as white supremacy, when it was a nationalist movement formed specifically to escape being the targets of those who, today, we consider to be white supremacists, and who considered European Jews to be foreigners? And as such, does “white” refer to a biological, phenotypical, or geographic category—is it something you *are*, that you *look* like, or where you are *from*?⁶¹ Or is it really a code word for Christian? And what is the relationship of religion and ethnicity, especially since one can convert into—and out of—Judaism?

And if Zionism is white supremacy, how does the Left go from seeing Jews as targets of genocide by the Nazi state—something the Allied powers declined to stop—to living in Displaced Persons camps after the war, to being the forefront of European imperialism by 1948, when Israel was founded?⁶² That is: Are Jews the least white group, or the most white? If the Roma are not white—their ancestors are thought to have migrated

from India to Europe around the middle of the first millennium CE—then how are Jews white, since their ancestors first migrated before that? If, as some Decolonization activists hold, white “settlers” are supposed to go back to Europe where they are from,”⁶³ then where do Jews go—and why wouldn’t that be Israel? If Palestinians are indigenous to Palestine, how is it that Jews are not? And if they are not, then where are they indigenous to? If Jews of European descent are simply considered “white” and the story of oppression is “White versus People of Color” (or “Settler versus Indigenous”), isn’t this just another narrative, just like class reductionism, which makes antisemitism disappear in a sleight of hand? And what happens when people of color, including black Americans, deploy antisemitism in a political milieu that believes that white people must “take the leadership of people of color” and that “white people have no right to criticize how people of color resist racism and colonialism,” when that leadership—and those words—are antisemitic?⁶⁴ These can be formulas to justify and defend antisemitism, and may have even been designed to function exactly this way.⁶⁵

Last, what are the role of Jews and antisemitism outside of Europe? Most English-speakers are not familiar with the longstanding Jewish presence—and, sometimes, persecution—in North Africa and the Middle East (including Yemen and Iran), but also Ethiopia, India, and China. Antisemitism is also found in areas where Jews have never historically had a presence, such as Japan.

4. Conspiracy, Denial—and Just Bad Politics

Any look at antisemitism is incomplete without a deep dive into the broader world of conspiracy theories, which are deeply entangled with antisemitism. When conspiracy theories were in vogue in the 1990s, on both the Left and Right, I saw them as a kind of kooky, but harmless, novelty.⁶⁶ Now I see their centrality to the Far Right worldview, and how pernicious, and deadly, they can be. At best they rot people’s brains, and at worst drive them into the hands of neo-Nazism. As Franz Fanon wrote in 1952’s *Black Skin, White Masks*:

At first glance it seems strange that the attitude of the anti-Semite can be equated with that of the negrophobe. It was my philosophy teacher from the Antilles who reminded me one day: “When you hear someone insulting the Jews pay attention; he is talking about you.” And I believed at the time he was universally right, meaning that I was responsible in my body and my soul for the fate reserved for my

brother. Since then, I have understood that what he meant quite simply was the anti-Semite is inevitably a negrophobe.⁶⁷

It is still true that many (white) antisemites are also White Nationalists and misogynists. Antisemitism is often the canary in the coal mine: where it exists, more shit politics follow. But, since Fanon wrote these words, the growth of antisemitism in both Black nationalist and leftist conspiracy circles has made the problem more diffuse.

Denial is also deeply important for antisemitism. Obviously, many antisemites deny the Holocaust. But many people who express antisemitic ideas also deny: that they personally hold antisemitic views; that antisemitism exists generally on the Left or in any specific circles; or that antisemitism exists at all. Last, sometimes they admit it exists—but deny its significance or its effects.

After participating in debates with defenders of a leftist who was collaborating with a Holocaust Denier, I identified this pattern:

- a. Denial:** Deny that there is any problem.
- b. Attack the Platform:** Criticize the publication where the accusation appeared.
- c. Livingstone Formulation:** Claim the person is under attack for Palestine Solidarity advocacy in cases where the incident in question involves something else.⁶⁸
- d. Cry “Zionism”:** Claim the accuser is a “Zionist,” regardless of whether this is true or not.
- e. Claim “Smear”:** It does what it says on the tin.
- f. Unfair “Guilt by Association”:** Claim that even a direct connection is merely “association.”
- g. Redirect:** Change the conversation to a different topic.
- h. Bait and Switch:** Claim the speaker said something different than what they did, and then attack this made-up claim.
- i. Unattainable Standards of Proof:** Admit there is antisemitism, but make your standard of proof so high that it is almost impossible to attain.
- j. Hide Behind a Jew:** Show that a Jewish person, with whom you are familiar, does not have an issue with the incident—so it is okay.
- k. False Equivalency:** Illustrate an unrelated incident and claim that since that was okay, so is this one.⁶⁹

There is no consensus on what antisemitism *is*. What is consistent is that for those influenced by antisemitism, antisemitism consistently is *not*.

Related to this is the prolific use of code words and synecdotal (Here synecdotal means that the term refers to a specific Jewish person or a subset of Jews, whereas a code word might refer to a group that is not directly identified as Jewish.). Making a quick list with some social media friends, I came up with about 75 different code words for Jews.⁷⁰ Why does antisemitism hide itself in this way? Is this related to the playfulness of the antisemite that Sartre talked about, the refusal to take responsibility for their actions, and the knowledge that facts do not back up their claims?⁷¹ Or is it part of the more general tendency in our society to be indirect in its bigotries—the use of “blue-haired feminists” instead of women, and “urban thugs” instead of black folks?

And how does one untangle the web of what’s an antisemitic conspiracy theory, a coded or synecdochical theory, and what’s simply influenced by one? If we looked at intent—and how would we judge that, and would it matter? (Do those of innocent intent get off with deploying demonizing narratives, and why should they?) Do we look at the objective impact a narrative has on Jews, and all the troubled issues that raises?

Which brings us to “bad politics” in general. Looking at antisemitism makes one consider bigger issues about how to look at and analyze the political and social world. Does it matter if a conspiracy theory is antisemitic, coded, or not? Aren’t they all nonsense that should be rejected? Similarly, shouldn’t personifications of systems; wrongheaded attacks on finance capital; and racial separatist movements which require mass expulsions, which would make the Nakba look small—including enemy of my enemy takes—be rejected in general, whether or not the specific form they take are antisemitic?

This is not a call to stake out a “correct theory” about all these issues, and to take on all comers, but rather to acknowledge that there are some *incorrect* theories, to point out that all narratives are not created equal, and to make clear that some seemingly benign epistemologies have dangerous origins and elective affinities.

5. Nations, National Self-Determination, Expulsions, Memory, and Restitution

The Left has some very specific discourses that it uses to look at Jews, and the Israel/Palestine conflict more generally. It’s a square peg being forced into a round hole, and the difference between the two is filled with antisemitism. I want to be very clear: *it’s not that the Left should be Zionist*. It’s just that the specific anti-Zionist narratives that are standard on the Left today usually show themselves to be problematic when they

are looked at from a Jewish viewpoint—and not to mention when basic histories of Jews, Israel, and Palestine are consulted. This includes exaggerated and cherry-picked histories, often with major pieces missing, and a downplaying or denial of the role and impact of antisemitism.⁷² There is also a consistent refusal to look at Palestinian and other Middle Eastern political movements with the same kind of historical and ideological eye that Western, and even Asian, movements are examined with.⁷³ There is no doubt, at least in my mind, that this is a conscious attempt by anti-Zionists to avoid acknowledging how much antisemitism has helped shape the critique of Zionism that both secular and religious anti-Zionists in the region hold to.

One of the basic notions where a bias against Jews is baked in is in the definition of a “nation.” An influential definition was articulated by Joseph Stalin in his 1913 essay “Marxism and the National Question,” where he says “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” This six-point definition has been used by Communists ever since.⁷⁴ The definition is important because a group must qualify as a “nation” in order to have “national self-determination”; otherwise they have no “national rights.” Stalin wrote specifically to exclude Jews from the definition—Jews had no common territory or single language—even though thousands were killed in pogroms in Russia during the 1903–1906 pogroms.⁷⁵

In practice, the Bolsheviks’ definition of which groups qualified as a “nation”—and possessed national self-determination, which in turned designated those nationalist struggles that Communists had consistent theoretical grounds to support—turned out to be fickle in application. For example, in 1928, while still denying Jews were a nation, the Comintern decided that African-Americans were a nation—despite very clearly failing to fulfill the requirement about language.⁷⁶ As a cynical consolation prize, Stalin established the remote region of Birobidzhan as the “Jewish Autonomous Oblast.” Jews became a “national minority”—although not a “nation.”⁷⁷ Instead of “self-determination,” Jews (among other minorities) had “Stalin-determination.”

In 1948, Stalin supported the formation of Israel—despite his historic denial of the Jewish right to national self-determination. The Soviets would later turn around, yet again, and declare that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination” in 1975, as part of UN resolution 3379.⁷⁸ Whether the Left saw Jews as a “nation” was clearly not the decision of the Jew themselves. The Jewish community, however, disagreed. And after all, what would “*self-determination*” even mean if someone else had

to grant you permission to enact it?

Here is where some of the Left's dirty laundry comes into play. Sometimes the Left supports "ethnostates" and other identity-based states. It also sometimes supports—or, at the least, turns a blind eye to—expulsions on racial, ethnic, religious, or other identity-based grounds.

This seems to be based on a crude calculation as to whether these nationalisms will benefit the Left or hurt it. When Zionism was opposed to Britain and therefore politically useful, the Left endorsed it; when Israel allied with the US and clashed with Arab regimes the Soviets were courting, it was labeled colonialism and rejected. The situation of the Kosovars is similar. They have a clear-cut argument for national self-determination; but because they opposed Serbia and were supported by the United States, some radicals said it wasn't a "real" nationalism because, as one anarchist argued in March 2008, "autonomous Kosovo is really nothing more than an appendage of the US and NATO, the site of an enormous U.S. military installation in the heart of the Balkans."⁷⁹ The recent cases in Ukraine and Georgia have met with the same approach; Russian-backed excursions aren't condemned because of Western Left sympathy for Putin as a global counterweight to the United States.

The twentieth century is filled with ethnic, racial, and religious massacres and expulsions, some on a massive scale. These include the 1947 India-Pakistan partition, the expulsion of ethnic Germans after World War Two and the movement of Poland's borders, Stalin's displacement of numerous ethnic minorities, the expulsions of almost all Middle Eastern and North African Jews between 1948 and 1967, and the continuing displacement and killing of ethnic minorities in Kurdistan and Tibet. This is in addition to the crimes of colonialism, as well as politically motivated massacres committed by those on the Right (Franco's Spain, Indonesian massacre of Communists) and Left (Stalin, Pol Pot, or the Ethiopian Derg). The twentieth-century was littered with atrocities.

The Israel-Palestine conflict had started with clashes and then riots between Palestinians and Jewish Zionists; these started as early as 1908 and hundreds were killed in the 1921, 1929 and 1936 events. Massacres continued during the 1948 war; the most famous was the Der Yasin massacre, although it was the largest of several committed by both sides.⁸⁰ Total numbers show the Israel-Palestine conflict is actually a rather minor conflict in global terms. Some researchers found that between 1945 and around 2005, the Israel-Palestine conflict ranked number 46th among number of victims—about 8,000.⁸¹ In fact, as the conflict has gotten deadlier, the Western rhetoric around it—which was at its most antisemitic in 2001–02 and 2005–06—has become less dramatic. (The typical

comparisons have moved from comparing Israel to a Nazi state, to an apartheid on.) The United Nations says that between January 2008 and August 2018, about 5,500 Palestinians, and 200 Israelis, were killed in the conflict. (For perspective: about 13,000 have been killed in the Ukraine-Russia conflict between April 2014 to January 2019.⁸²) The level of rhetoric appears disconnected from the intensity of what is occurring on the ground.

This is of importance since the pivotal issue in these questions is the Right of Return, which is an attempt to gain justice for Palestinians who were victims of the events of 1948, called the Nakba (“Catastrophe”), which included massacres and expulsions.⁸³ This is the core issue which decides whether you are “Zionist” or “anti-Zionist,” since the Right of Return has the power to end a Jewish majority in Israel.⁸⁴

Here the double standards come into play. Undoubtedly, the victims of this expulsion deserve justice. Of course, justice in the form of the Right of Return would unwind Israel. But Zionism is something the European and U.S. Left opposed, then supported—including during the expulsions themselves—before opposing them again after the expulsions had taken place. But the Left is silent about other expulsions and massacres. Why doesn’t the Left champion restitution for those ethnic groups who were the victims of Stalinism at the same time?

Even when it does support memory and restitution for the victims, it never draws such a formal line in the sand—expelling those who don’t pass its litmus test, and driving itself into scandals, again and again. (Even the anti-Zionist Left, however, does not reflect on its own culpability in these events. One would think Stalin would be condemned by his key support in ensuring the victory of the forces of the emerging Israeli state during the 1948 war.)

The important thing here is not to say, “Israel is not as bad as other countries, so it needs to be let off the hook,” nor is it to say “Since some Mizrahi Jews were expelled by Arab countries, it’s okay that Palestinians were expelled in the Nakba.”⁸⁵

But the question is, “Why is Israel on the hook when other countries are not?” Why do we draw such an intense line over the Nakba expulsions—to the point of breaking up leftist coalitions which are not about the Israel/Palestine conflict—when in similar or worse instances, expulsions and mass killings are often ignored? Why does the Left refuse to address questions of Mizrahi expulsions? The answer that I personally have concluded is that “Jewish crimes are more heinous than criminal acts by other groups, and those same acts against Jews do not need to be addressed.” (This is a question specifically for the Left itself; other

perspectives—like those of people who were expelled—are perfectly legitimate in continuing to fixate on the expulsions.)

This feeds into the larger question of why does the Left treat *some* nationalisms by oppressed people as good, and *others* as bad? Why are some racial expulsions tolerated—and sometimes openly supported—while others are portrayed as the embodiment of evil? And why are some existing repressive identity-based states, like Iran, tolerated—even sometimes seen as allies? Why are some movements to create new ethnostates—even those that would require millions of people to be expelled on the basis of their race—are feted and supported by certain parts of the Left. These include, but are not limited to, Black Nationalists who seek a new country in the five Deep South states, as well as advocates of decolonization that support the expulsion of “settlers” from North America. The former is far more common than many people, who are not versed with the implications of the left’s terms, understand; black “national self-determination” includes the right to form a separate racial state.⁸⁶

If Zionism is racism, then it certainly is not alone among the many nationalist movements of oppressed peoples. And, a more accurate comparison would be to equate Zionism to Black Nationalism. This, in fact, was a position held by many black radicals until the late 1960s—including by Black Panther Party members like Eldridge Cleaver.⁸⁷

Related issues of definition come up here. Zionism is frequently referred to as “imperialism” and Israel as a “settler-colony.” These terms are often little labeled with little evidence or argument behind them. Imperialism, and colonialism, are complex phenomena.

Zionism was a mostly (although not entirely) movement of deeply oppressed European people who established a new state, in a different location, for the purpose of self-defense and community regeneration. Of course, in the process of doing so, the Zionists committed atrocities and the majority of Palestinians were expelled.

The questions of imperialism and colonialism also raise contextual questions. Israel is neither an extension of a European state, nor is it a colony of Europe (and, despite the claims of antisemites, the United States and Europe are not colonies of Israel). It is neither the tail nor the dog. That said, elements of both colonialism and imperialism were present, and the danger of the Zionist movement being seen and labeled as imperialism—especially because of its relationship to the British, who occupied by the region in the interwar period—was openly discussed by its supporters before Israel was established.⁸⁸ For example, in 1945, the philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote:

the Zionists, if they continue to ignore the Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big faraway powers, will appear only as their tools, the agents of foreign and hostile interests. Jews who know their own history should be aware that such a state of affairs will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred; the antisemitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences.⁸⁹

But, overall, there are more differences than commonalities between Zionism and imperialism. Installing a comprador class who help with the process of the extraction of natural resources, as the British did in India, is exactly the opposite of what Zionists did in Palestine—what Walter Laqueur called “a small country without any natural resources.”⁹⁰ We need to look deeply at why the Left insists on a simple reduction of one to the other. Indeed, the settler-colony analysis has more conceptual backing to it than the category of “imperialism.”⁹¹ (The special feature of settler-colonies is that the colonial population moves into the territory and displaces the existing one, whether by expulsion or extermination.)

Last, there is a special question for anti-statists: What would a consistent approach to questions of ethnic and national conflicts look like *without* embracing national self-determination? Zionists tend to insist on the Jewish right of national self-determination while ignoring the Palestinian, and anti-Zionists do vice versa. (Some anti-Zionists uphold Jewish self-determination but turn around and declare that it can only be invoked in Europe, which—while an interesting idea, would also require ethnic expulsions—is of course not “self” determination at all.) The three main Palestinian solutions are a new, Palestinian-majority state alongside Israel (Fatah), a single Islamist state (Hamas), or a multiethnic state (PFLP). Despite the presence of a handful of anarchists in Palestine, the Palestinian Solidarity movement is a de facto statist movement supporting ethno-nationalist, theocratic or liberal goals. So why are radicals who oppose nations and states involved in this struggle at all, especially when they sit out numerous others around the world? What would a consistent position of opposition to national self-determination mean when one group has enacted it and another group wants to?

6. The “Anti” –Isms

The Left is used to looking at how ideologies such as Marxism, anarchism, Zionism, or liberalism change and develop over periods of

time. But it's often blind to the fact that "anti-imperialism" and "anti-Zionism" (and, for that matter, "antifascism") are not merely tactical oppositions to politics, but are actually standalone ideologies with their own history and development that can be tracked and analyzed.

Anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism, in particular, have significantly different strains within them; for example, some oppose Israel because Jews control Al-Aqsa, while others see it as a racist, apartheid state. Some see the Israelis as Nazis, while others openly align with actual neo-Nazis against Israel. Some forms of both anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism are conspiratorial, and antisemitic. Often, they are based on dualistic stereotypes, including demonizing opponents while lavishly praising their heroes, which often occurs in a Manichean mode.⁹²

Anti-Zionism can be found different political ideologies. For example, anti-Zionism on the Left can be found among anarchists, socialists, Communists, and pacifists. On the Right, it can be found among neo-Nazis, paleo-conservatives, libertarians, and Far Right conspiracy theorists. It is a pillar of Islamist movements, from the Sunni "moderate Islamism" of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafi jihadism of Al-Qaeda, and the Shiite Islamists of the Iranian regime and Hezbollah. Anti-Zionism is an ideological glue among various ethnic and racial Nationalists—including Palestinian, Black, pan-Arabist, Ba'athist, Scottish, and many other nationalisms. And, of course, anti-Zionism is also found in different religious-political currents—including Muslim, Christian, and occasionally even Jewish ones.

Anti-imperialism is an even more malleable ideology. In fact, it was not a pillar of left-wing thought at its beginnings; it is readily apparent that, for example, Marx and Engels's views on colonialism and imperialism—especially in their earlier writings, they were not always opposed to it—are different from those of Lenin's generation of socialists and after.⁹³

Conspiratorial anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism also can act to build bridges between the Left and Right. For example, Alison Weir has made a career out of regurgitating prewar antisemitic narratives veiled as anti-Zionism. And she has a solid following on both the Left and Right. In Eugene, Oregon, one "peace and justice"-style group became deeply involved in antisemitic and White nationalist politics via their adherence to the "Israel Lobby" conspiracy theory.⁹⁴ Black and White Separatists often bond over shared antisemitism, and anti-Zionism links the Western secular Left and Islamists in the Middle East. It has even led to overtures by neo-Nazis to militant Palestinian factions, from secular leftists to Islamists. Hitler set a clear precedent with his alliance with the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini, the Muslim religious leader of British-controlled

Palestine. During the war, the Mufti met with Hitler and also helped recruit an SS division of Bosnian Muslims.⁹⁵

Inside of the Left, there is no self-conscious look at the specific anti-Zionisms of different Palestinian factions (or of others in the region, such as Hezbollah), or of how the Left's view of Zionism has changed. In particular, the secular anti-Zionism of many Palestinian actors—which influences Western anti-Zionism—is not looked at by the Left. In the 1950s and '60s, a wave of “anti-Zionism”, which was really a thinly coded antisemitic campaign, swept Eastern Bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. There were no “Zionists” there to speak of in the countries like Poland—just Jews. For example, in 1967 the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* wrote that the United States was a “Zionist colony.”⁹⁶ A popular Soviet lecturer, directing his comments to PLO supporters, said, “Eighty-percent of the economy of non-Communist nations is concentrated in the hands of ‘Zionist capitalists.’ 95% of the propaganda efforts undertaken in the capitalist world are concentrated in the hands of the Zionists, 99% in the United States.”⁹⁷

This framework was then exported to the PLO and other secular leftists in the 1960s and '70s, who were receiving support and training from the Soviet Union, and were in conflict with actual Zionists. From there it took on a life of its own. Today, it exists side-by-side with an Islamist anti-Zionism which was heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda efforts in the 1930s.⁹⁸

This created a pincer move of antisemitic currents; both Muslim religious, and secular Left, anti-Zionisms in Palestine are influenced by Nazi and Stalinist antisemitisms, respectively. (This is in addition to Christian antisemitism in the Middle East, which was an influence on an 1840 Damascus blood libel incident; there, a number of Jews were accused of the blood libel—killing Christian children for ritual purposes.)

Ideologies float around, even between groups of people who aren't close politically; sometimes they are opposed, such as when Western secular leftist anti-imperialism influenced Al Qaeda. Historians have showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that many Middle Eastern anti-Zionisms are influenced by European antisemitism. And Western anti-Zionism is influenced by Arab anti-Zionism—explicitly in the case of BDS, which for legitimacy touts that it emerged from calls from Palestinian civil society. So shouldn't this call for a reflection on anti-Zionist ideology itself, to understand its roots, assumptions, and implications?

Zionism itself is usually presented as a monolithic ideology. As with the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, standard histories will immediately dispel the cartoonish image painted by Western anti-Zionists. Zionism

itself ranged from cultural Zionism, to anarcho-Zionism, Labor Zionism, and Revisionists. And today these have been joined by a host of different views about what Israel is and how global Jewry should approach it. And not just are there many Zionisms, there are many anti-Zionisms. In fact, as Noam Chomsky pointed out, before 1948, he was a binationalist—an advocate of a single, independent state in all of what was then British-controlled Palestine (which today includes Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank), and then this was a form of Zionism, since it advocated a Jewish presence in, and identification with, that area. He has held the same position consistently, and today binationalism is considered anti-Zionist.⁹⁹

Last, there is not just the actual Zionist movement—both before and after the establishment of Israel—but there are also many different *definitions* of what is called “Zionism.” For some people, “Zionists” are supporters of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and those to his right, who want to absorb all of the Occupied Territories into an Israel in which only Jews have full rights. For some, it’s those that think that Diaspora Jews should have an identification with Israel. Others hold that it’s anyone that thinks Israel should allow to remain a Jewish state—even with a Palestinian state beside them. Some use it to label anyone who opposes left-wing antisemitism. And antisemites like David Duke use it as a mere codeword for Jews. So not just are there literally different strains of *actual* Zionism, there are also different kinds of politics and identities that are *called* Zionists by outsiders. Benjamin Franks notes at least ten separate usages of the term.¹⁰⁰

7. The Left, Jews, and Antisemitism

The Left—especially Palestine Solidarity activists—frequently proclaim that they are on the front lines of fighting antisemitism. But this is at best a vast misrepresentation—and at worst an outright lie. The Left as a whole has a poor historical record in combating antisemitism, in addition to its own streak of engaging in it.

Stalin’s equivocation on the “Jewish question” was by no means unique. The Left’s attitude towards Jews shifts by country, time, and sect. Right now, there is broad agreement outside the Left that is in a period where it is entangled in antisemitism. The mainstream of the Jewish community—in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere—appears to be moving away from the Left. They are instead embracing a liberal centrism that supports Israel, such as the Clintonite wing of the Democratic party, and some are joining the pro-Israel right-wing; for example, the Jewish presence in the Alt Lite is openly visible.¹⁰¹

And this raises the bigger questions about the Left. How is it that the

Left picks up certain issues, but ignores others? (Why Palestinians, but not other oppressed groups?) Who decides this? In the old days, the Chinese and Soviet regimes were main ideological poles, but who decides how issues go on and off the Left's radar now?

And what happens when people inside of the Left find themselves at odds with the larger movement—not just over issues of antisemitism, but homophobia, patriarchy, racism and other issues? Some try to change the movements from within; sometimes people form their own, identity-specific groups within them; sometimes they pursue separatist movements, either as leftists (left-wing nationalist movements, like Socialist Zionism or the Republic of New Africa) or not (those New Leftists who went onto lesbian separatism and cultural black nationalism).

I, personally, have learned to be far more leery of the Left. During the initial years of the anti-globalization movement, I went with the then-popular approach in embracing various issues, including anti-Zionism, that were suddenly swept up in the “movement of movements.” In retrospect, especially considering the Left's historic failure on questions of antisemitism, this was a mistake. We should have pushed back against uncritically incorporating anti-Zionism into our movement, since in retrospect the version that came in had a particularly antisemitic slant to it. Now, when a new set of politics comes into vogue, I make sure to look closely at first—and especially if their supporters deploy moralistic language to insist that we “must” support their issue, or that we have “no right to question them.” I realized that the Left—and not only supporters of the Communist states and vulgar anti-imperialists who took an “Enemy of my Enemy is my friend” position—could be an apologist for oppression and discrimination. And sometimes this was not done out of ignorance, but was a conscious act of support. Sometimes the Left revel in these positions. This is certainly the case with antisemitism, where some anti-Zionists make a point of proclaiming that it is a “badge of honor” to be called an antisemite.¹⁰²

Antisemitism is also deeply involved in junctures between political movements. It's important to Left-Right crossover movements, where political space is shared or movements have mixtures of both left- and right-wing ideology, like Third Positionism, Strasserism, and National Bolshevism.¹⁰³

Antisemitism is also important in certain political factions that move from Left-to-Right. This can be both in embracing antisemitism (and moving into fascist movements) or rejecting it (and becoming part of the conservative mainstream, especially neoconservatives).

Jews were a prominent part of a special U.S. Left-to-Right movement,

usually referred to as a trajectory from Trotskyism to Neoconservatism. In fact, this refers to two parallel tendencies. One tendency are the Shachtmanites, who, as the Cold War went on, turned to supporting right-wing hawks in their battle with Communists around the world (including in Southeast Asia and Latin America), while still holding to social democracy. For this wing, the New Left's sudden switch in 1967 from pro- to anti-Israel—and larger embrace of all kinds of nationalist and Communist movements and regimes—seems to have clearly played a role in it. The other is a trajectory in which some who had started in the Trotskyist movement ended up as founders of neoconservatism and otherwise as neoliberals, especially Irving Kristol.¹⁰⁴

I have personally seen a number of Jewish activists become frustrated with left antisemitism, usually around the Israel-Palestine conflict, and they become liberals or conservatives. Most recently and prominently, this includes David Hirsh, the longtime Trotskyist critic of left antisemitism; in 2019 he resigned from the Labour Party saying, “Personally, I have had enough of being humiliated by antisemitism in the Labour movement.” and “I won’t subject myself to it any longer.” Elsewhere he has stated “I am not a socialist.”¹⁰⁵ And there are undoubtedly many more David Hirsh’s out there.

8. Not Just the “Jewish Question,” but the “Identity Question”: How Does the Left Relate to Questions of Identity?

At the bottom of these complex sets of questions is actually a simple need. The Left needs to have a consistent, self-reflective approach to deal with the questions and needs of various oppressed minorities—instead of embracing some groups’ approaches to fight oppression, while rejecting others.

This is not just a question of which groups comprise a nation and, therefore have self-determination. The questions should be: What’s a nation, and why does the Left still use this category? What is self-determination anyway, and why should the Left use this concept? Why have other perspectives for minority group representation—like those of the Jewish Bund, the Austro-Marxists, and the classical anarchists—been discarded? (All three rejected geographic ethno-separatism, instead offering different approaches to ensure that minority groups would be guaranteed the full right to practice their culture.) What opportunities are offered by new forms, like the council system in Rojava, which rejects geographic ethnic separatism, but still has guarantees for protections of minorities and offers council forms they can use for representation?¹⁰⁶

What is the function of internal group representation (like internal caucuses in a group) and independent organizations (such as APOC, Anarchist/Autonomous People of Color)—and how are these groups similar to, and different from, larger separatist currents? Is cosmopolitanism the Left’s goal, and if so, how does it relate to various systems of identity representation? What happened to the Civil Rights Movement’s goal of a racially integrated society, and is that embraced or rejected by today practitioners of identity politics? What did “multiculturalism” have to offer that’s been lost by this transition? And what about those who advocate the abolition of identity altogether? Do these “identity-blind” forms really mask the ethnic supremacy of the dominant group, as is commonly claimed? How can class reductionism—which ignores issues of antisemitism and racism—end up playing into bigotry, such as happened with the French Negationists? And why can the same “race-blind” ideology in other cases—like the early IWW—be successful in forming multi-racial groups?¹⁰⁷

And how do existing left-wing ethno-nationalisms—including European forms like Scottish, Irish, and Basque Nationalism—relate to all this? If the Left does support “national self-determination,” which currents or parties are seen as the legitimate representatives of that nation, and by what right? (For example, Western Palestinian Solidarity activists tend to completely ignore the opinions of Fatah and the Israeli Arab parties—not to mention Arab Israelis who support Israel. The Druze, also largely loyal to Israel, are also ignored—unless something happens to them that can be fitted into the anti-Zionist narrative.)

What happens when the “leadership of the oppressed” is riven with bigotry, such as is the crystal-clear case of the Nation of Islam? Or “the oppressed” don’t do what the Left wants them to? What happens when minority groups reject “The Left’s” conclusion that they are or are not nations, that they are or are not oppressed, and that they do or do not have self-determination? What happens when the Left changes its mind about them, as it has done continuously with Jews generally, and Israel more specifically? Are minorities just pawns in the Left’s hands, to be alternately supported and opposed, as is convenient or fits into some larger political plan? (Some black activists see the historic relationship between the largely white U.S. Left and the black liberation struggle this way—for good reasons.)

And what happens when these abstract questions meet concrete claims? Specifically, what should the Jews have done after the Holocaust to protect themselves? Where should the postwar Jews, living in European Displaced Persons camps, have gone? Like it or not, the answer for many of them

was to support those nationalists who wished to form a Jewish state. This was to act both as a place to emigrate to—as most countries closed their doors to Jewish emigration both before and during the Holocaust—and a place where Jews could at least defend themselves, since it became clear that no one else would. (It was also a convenient answer for Europeans who could get rid of the remaining Jews.) While this answer was a catastrophe for Palestinians, it was at least a clear answer to the problem of antisemitism. It was also one supported, not just by the Jewish community, but by the Left of the period. Although some leftists started turning against Israel as soon as the early 1950s, it was only after 1967 that the Palestinian issue became of widespread concern to the Western Left. Interest in the issue has come and gone in the U.S. until the Second Intifada, after which it has consistently been treated as a question of world-historical importance.

What does it mean that the Left has now changed its analysis of Zionism, from being a legitimate form of self-determination for a group that survived genocide, to a form of oppression? How is it that, as David Hirsh puts it, for the Left, “Jews, who could not have been more oppressed in 1944, can be thought of four short years later as the bearers of white European colonialism.”¹⁰⁸ Now the Left wants to undo the answer that nationalist Jews provided to the question of antisemitism. But what does the Left offer in its place to safeguard global Jewry? (Spoiler: absolutely nothing.) In fact, the Left is, in various ways, actually harnessing antisemitic narratives and assumptions, and collaborating with antisemitic groups, to undo what the Jewish community sees as its bulwark against oppression and persecution.

The Jewish community as a whole will never support anti-Zionism unless the Left can answer this question. Israel exists as a last case scenario for them against a fickle world—a fickleness that is particularly pronounced on the Left.

E. TOWARD A FUTURE LEFT ANTI-ANTISEMITISM

Just like with the sectarian Communist newspaper seller, many Left activists want to have the relationship between antisemitism and the Left spelled out for them, especially regarding to anti-Zionism. But antisemitism eludes easy definitions, and that refusal appears to be a feature and not a bug. Antisemitism and anti-Zionism, in particular, may act like both a particle and a wave. Looked at from one perspective, there is absolutely no connection. Looked at from another, the overlap is complete. The truth lies somewhere in-between the two.

I, the other people involved in the study group, and others around us, all went through similar processes while wrangling with this problem. We moved in different political directions. There was a definite tendency to move towards a strong support of the Two State Solution (after, in some cases, starting as vulgar anti-Zionists). Some stayed anti-Zionist, but increased the nuance in their critique. Others, not in the group, took an even further path. More than one became an “anti-extremist” liberal, and another floated to the right-wing.

For me, I both felt a much greater sympathy for Palestinians, while simultaneously realizing that left anti-Zionism was far more entangled in antisemitism than I had initially thought, and antisemitism more widespread in society as a whole. I doubled down on anti-nationalism, which I had floated a bit away from—without recognizing it—as a part of the anti-globalization movement, along with and some unholy mix of anti-civ and anti-imperialist politics. I also became more interested in perspectives like Jewish Bundism and Austro-Marxism, as well as Rojava’s council system. All of them provided a way for historically oppressed groups to express their concerns and demands, while rejecting kind territorial claims of “national self-determination.”

After many years of study on this problem I have found a few starting points, but no final answers. I have elucidated the various questions that I and others have explored over the years in relationship to issues about Jews, antisemitism, and anti-Zionism.

And I have decided that for the Left—which, as a whole, portrays “Zionism” as a cartoonish villain that is the epitome of all global wrongs—can only come to this position if its analysis is influenced by antisemitism. I elucidated many questions above, and to answer each of them, not just siding with non-Jews in their conflicts with Jews in each situation—but relying on lies, exaggerations, and bigoted narratives to do so—marks the clear presence of antisemitism overall. In short, the blacker and whiter that anti-Zionists paint the situation, the more antisemitic their view is.

So what I am asking for? For those on the Left involved in issues regarding the Jewish community—and this includes, specifically, Israel, which is the single largest Jewish collectivity in the world and the center of much Jewish life—that they be aware that the Left has a legacy of biased views about Jews. That means that it is likely that their political legacy continues to be marked by these views. And that in almost all cases regarding Jews, the Left presents a simplistic narrative that is awash in bias, myth, conspiracy, symbolism, denial, and projection.

Antisemitism should be treated the same way the left deals with other –isms. How would the Left react if a prominent activist labeled “Islam” a

“problem”? Would it side with an Islamophobic militia that was killing unarmed civilians? Would the Left suddenly say that Muslims have no right to be the arbiters of what constitutes Islamophobia, and that, for example, Jews should get to decide that? That’s how the Left treats Jews and Jewish collectivities.

Any real starting point for the Left must acknowledge how its larger views are deeply problematic in regards to:

1. conspiracy theories generally,
2. the use of personification to represent systems,
3. the attacks on finance capital to the exclusion of industrial capital,
4. the use of a “two-camp” vulgar imperialism that simplistically divides the world into oppressor and oppressed nations, and
5. the inconsistent deployment of the concept of “national self-determination.”

In regards to anti-Zionism specifically, the Left must recognize that:

6. anti-Zionism has a historic entanglement with antisemitism,
7. that supporting openly antisemitic groups is unacceptable, and
8. that antisemitic narratives—including conspiracies of global control and Holocaust Denial—must be condemned, both in the Left’s own ranks and without.

As to the question of how to treat Zionism, anti-Zionism, Israel, and BDS: I find that this does not have a clear-cut answer. I do not believe there is a simple, correct “line” to hand to activists who engage in activism around the conflict—and in particular, there is no position that can be said to be fair to both Jews and Palestinians. A Two State Solution will be obviously be unfair to Palestinians expelled in 1948. Forcing a binationalist state upon present-day Israel, in the context of a campaign that has long relied on harnessing antisemitism in its criticisms, and overwhelmingly against the will of the Israeli population, will, at best, only reintroduce all the problems of pre-1948 antisemitism again—questions that the Left has no answer to.

Certainly, part of the problem here has to do with how fanatically people hold to either anti-Zionism or Two State formulas and cannot get along even when the specifics of their proposals appear to be more like gradations on a scale than sides of chasm. It’s almost a leap of faith to pick a side, and to admit to oneself that the other party will be wronged. One side simply accepts that there will be antisemitism as part of this, and the

other accepts that Palestinian injustices will go unresolved.

In the absence of a correct answer, for those who do activism on this issue, I would say that all of the questions that I explained in this essay must be struggled with and taken seriously—and not, as they are now, glibly dismissed out of hand. And I believe that it is through the struggle itself—and not necessarily in the answers produced—that antisemitism is countered. The struggle makes Jews real people—not symbols or ciphers. It makes their history the history of a really lived experience, and not just the epitome of an evil system. And it makes the question of how to deal with antisemitism concrete: one that requires that specific answers be given to it.

Any Left analysis of Jews and Zionism that does not do this is not worth holding. Just as white supremacy and patriarchy are baked into our society and our own consciousness, so is antisemitism. It will not start to purge itself without a struggle.

The Left needs to start struggling.

ENDNOTES

NOTE: Links that are not dated were accessed November 2019.

¹ This was Reverend Billy’s Church of Stop Shopping at St. Marks Church in Manhattan’s East Village.

² One, as part of recent linguistic shifts, I will use “antisemitism” and not “anti-Semitism.” There is no “Semitism”—only Semitic languages; and although we are stuck with the term, it is good to remember its origin as a euphemism for the then-popular term “Jew haters.”

Second, this study limits itself to the Anglophone (that is, the English-speaking) Left, and is focused on the United States, where I live. This is because most of this essay consists of the details of varying groups’ ideological beliefs of, and the dynamics and discourses that happen inside, activist groups and milieus. This is simply the political milieu that I am comfortable claiming this analysis applies to. No doubt similar dynamics exist elsewhere in the Western Left, however. I have also heard about antisemitic elements in the Latin American and African Left, although—like many things in the essay—these milieus are too far outside of my own knowledge base to make claims about.

Third, the “Left” that this essay refers to consists primary of anarchists, Communists, social democrats, and other progressive activists who are

openly critical of capitalism, whether from a reformist or revolutionary perspective. In the United States, this includes everything from the left-wing of the Democratic Party and *Democracy Now* to insurrectionist anarchists. This is a broad swath of differing groups and ideas, but they all share a common set of ideas and are in an internal dynamic with each other—whether they would like to admit this or not.

Fourth, “Zionist” refers to those who seek to retain a Jewish state in any kind of boundary among the current state of Israel (it did not, however, necessary mean this before 1948). This includes those who support a separate Palestinian state alongside Israel. Inversely, “anti-Zionist” refers to those who seek to dissolve Israel as a Jewish state. In actual usage in political milieus, these terms get used much more loosely.

³ Looking over the last decade, in the United States, left writers include Chip Berlet, April Rosenblum, Ross Wolfe, Bill Weinberg, and Matthew Lyons. The Institute for Social Ecology has been one of the few consistent homes for this; writers include Blair Taylor, Peter Staudenmaier, Rob Augman, and Eirik Eiglad. A number of important critics have recently passed away, including Robert Fine, Moishe Postone, and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz. Platforms where this criticism appears, to varying degrees, include *LibCom*, *Dissent*, and Political Research Associates. Some left writers have penned individual pieces, such as Yotam Marom. In Britain, where the situation with the Labour Party make this a larger issue, there are more voices; the louder ones include Ben Gidley, Keith Kahn-Harris, David Hirsh, Philip Spencer, Brendan McGeever, and the heterodox Trotskyist party Alliance for Workers’ Liberty. There is a very strong tradition of opposition to left antisemitism in Germany, although only a few of these writers are translated into English; they include Sina Arnold and Dominique Miething. There are also many more academics that publish in niche scholarly journals and some university presses.

⁴ The dialogue seems to the varied between unproblematic and pro-Nazi. David Hirsh says, that at the march accompanying the NGO conference, “slogans were carried like ‘Kill all the Jews’ and ‘the good things Hitler did’. Pamphlets were handed out with a portrait of Hitler, displaying the text: ‘What if I had won? The good things: There would be NO Israel and NO Palestinian’s blood shed—the rest is your guess. The bad things: I wouldn’t have allowed the making of the new beetle—the rest is your guess.’” David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2018), 142.

⁵ Noam Chomsky, "Anti-Semitism, Zionism, and the Palestinians," *Variant* #16, nd, www.variant.org.uk/16texts/Chomsky.html; transcription of an October 11, 2002 talk.

⁶ "Michelle Goldberg's Slight of Hand on BDS," *Anti-Defamation League*, nd, www.adl.org/news/media-watch/michelle-goldbergs-slight-of-hand-on-bds.

⁷ "Linda Sarsour: Zionism and Feminism Are Incompatible," *JTA*, March 15, 2017, www.haaretz.com/us-news/linda-sarsour-zionism-and-feminism-are-incompatible-1.5448822.

⁸ In Germany, the post-autonome and antifa movements have been split for years, over the issues of antisemitism and Israel, into the so-called "anti-Deutsch" (or anti-German) and "anti-imp" (anti-imperialist) camps. This issue is not what it seems to outsiders, and the complexity of it is beyond the scope of this essay, other than to say that one side is centrally concerned with antisemitism and is pro-Israel, and the other side is deeply anti-Zionist and does not recognize left antisemitism as a central issue.

⁹ Daniel Sugarman, "Women's March vote off new board member Zahra Billoo over tweets about Israel and Zionism," *Jewish Chronicle*, September 19, 2019, www.thejc.com/news/us-news/women-s-march-vote-off-new-board-member-zahra-billoo-over-tweets-about-israel-and-zionism-1.488897.

¹⁰ "Community 'lost for words' as Neturei Karta meets Jobbik in London," *Jewish News*, January 29, 2014, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/community-lost-for-words-as-neturei-karta-meets-jobbik>.

¹¹ Jessica Elgot, "Strictly Orthodox Neturei Karta's new alliance with extreme right," *Jewish Chronicle*, June 7, 2012, www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/strictly-orthodox-neturei-karta-s-new-alliance-with-extreme-right-1.33770.

¹² Frank Newport, "American Jews, Politics and Israel," *Gallup*, August 27, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/265898/american-jews-politics-israel.aspx>. His numbers look like they may be biased towards the section of U.S. Jews who are more likely to be pro-Israel.

¹³ In New York City, Kolot Chayeinu in Brooklyn is openly inclusive of anti-Zionists, but that is not its position, and Zionists attend services as well. Nationally, there are no statistically significant studies of anti-zionism among U.S. Jews. The wording of any legitimate study would have to be done very carefully, especially as there are so many different interpretations of what "Zionism" is. There is no doubt a large number of

Jews who have ambivalent attitudes toward Israel; but the number that actively seek to dissolve Israel as a Jewish state is undoubtedly a small minority. For a summary of recent statistical work on U.S. Jewish opinions toward Israel, see Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Less than the 8% of black voters went for Trump. Election 2016 “Exit Polls,” *CNN Politics*, November 23, 2016, www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls.

¹⁵ Mark Gardner, “‘The Zionists are our Misfortune’: On the (not so) new Antisemitism,” *Democratiya* #10, August 2007, 72–86; www.dissentmagazine.org/democratiya_article/the-zionists-are-our-misfortune-on-the-not-so-new-antisemitism.

¹⁶ For example, in July 2014—during Israeli attack on Gaza which killed over 2,000—in France “eight synagogues were attacked. One, in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles, was firebombed by a 400-strong mob. A kosher supermarket and pharmacy were smashed and looted; the crowd's chants and banners included ‘Death to Jews’ and ‘Slit Jews’ throats.” There were many more incidents across Europe as well, including the firebombing of a German synagogue that had been rebuilt after it was destroyed during Kristallnacht. Jon Henley, “Antisemitism on rise across Europe ‘in worst times since the Nazis,’” *Guardian*, August 7, 2014, www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/07/antisemitism-rise-europe-worst-since-nazis.

¹⁷ Some argue that If “Zionism” only refers to support for maintaining control of the Occupied Territories. But if that’s the case, why doesn’t the Left say so?

¹⁸ See, respectively, “UK Labour lawmakers lash leaders on anti-Semitism figures,” *Times of Israel*, February 12, 2019, www.timesofisrael.com/uk-labour-lawmakers-lash-leaders-over-anti-semitism-figures; Joseph Bergeroct, “Cries of Anti-Semitism, but Not at Zuccotti,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-criticized-for-flashes-of-anti-semitism.html; John-Paul Pagano, “The Women's March Has a Farrakhan Problem,” *Atlantic*, March 8, 2018, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/womens-march/555122.

¹⁹ “Citybikes Boycott is Over: Workers Cooperative Parts Ways with Antisemitic Activist Tim Calvert,” *Rose City Antifa*, June 5, 2013, <https://rosecityantifa.org/articles/citybikes-boycott-is-over-workers-cooperative-parts-ways-with-antisemitic-activist-tim-calvert>.

²⁰ Jacob Siegel, “Jew-Hater Christopher Bollyn Brings 9/11 False Flag Act to the Brooklyn Commons,” *Daily Beast*, September 10, 2016 (updated April 13, 2017), www.thedailybeast.com/jew-hater-christopher-bollyn-brings-911-false-flag-act-to-the-brooklyn-commons.

²¹ “Statement in Support of Brooklyn Commons and Melissa Ennen,” *Brooklyn For Peace*, nd, <http://brooklynpeace.org/?p=5893>; “Common Decency in the Face of the Far Right: A Call to Boycott the Brooklyn Commons,” *Common Decency*, nd, <https://commondecencynyc.com>.

²² This story has many parts, and I did not attend the conference myself. The conference organizers published the panel description and let Kanaan speak. Regarding what happened afterward, I have heard numerous, conflicting accounts—including by people who changed their story at different times when they spoke to me or to others. The only thing that is agreed upon is that people attended the talk to confront him, but he did not address the question of “Judaism” in his talk. Ramsey Kanaan, “What’s Wrong with the American Anarchist Movement?” panel on August 17, 2002, as part of the summer 2002 “Renewing the Anarchist Tradition,” conference, [www.homemadejam.org/renew/archive/2002/2002\(2\).html](http://www.homemadejam.org/renew/archive/2002/2002(2).html).

²³ The Faurisson scandal involved a French ultra-Left bookstore-turned-publisher, La Vieille Taupe (“The Old Mole”), which included Pierre Guillaume, who had been in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Guillaume revived the name of the then-defunct project and started printing Holocaust Denial books. Chomsky had signed a public letter in support of a French Holocaust Denier, Robert Faurisson, and wrote an essay about him, called “Some Elementary Comments on the Rights of Freedom of Expression.” In it he called Faurisson a “relatively apolitical liberal” and denied he was an antisemite. La Vieille Taupe then issued Chomsky’s essay as an introduction to Faurisson’s *Memoire en defense* in 1980, although without Chomsky’s permission. Chomsky has defended his position over the years on this issue, while also dismissing U.S. antisemitism in general and left antisemitism in particular. More recently, he has gone out of his way to attack the antifascist movement. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xv–xvi, 9–11, 65–73, 116–20.

²⁴ While in recent decades a well-funded, right-leaning pro-Israel lobby has come into existence, it does not control U.S. foreign policy. This policy has been consistent in regards to Israel since the 1960s—long before this lobby achieved its current form. The “Zionist Lobby”

narrative is one the oldest, and most popular, antisemitic conspiracy theories in the United States—although it can be found in many countries, including ones with a miniscule number of Jews. Alison Weir’s work is primarily a long elaboration of this conspiracy theory.

²⁵ Spencer Sunshine, “Campus Profile—Alison Weir: If Americans Knew,” *Political Research Associates*, May 15, 2014, www.politicalresearch.org/campus-profile-alison-weir-if-americans-knew.

²⁶ “Jewish Voice for Peace Statement on Our Relationship with Alison Weir,” June 15, 2015, *Jewish Voice for Peace*, <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/jewish-voice-for-peace-statement-on-our-relationship-with-alison-weir>; “Statement on Complaint Filed Regarding Alison Weir and If Americans Knew,” *U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation*, July 16, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190904201007/https://uscpr.org/archive/article.php-id=4510.html>.

²⁷ Many JVP members signed a letter of support for her. See “An open letter to the U.S. Campaign and other Activists for Justice in Palestine,” nd, <https://stopdivisiveattacks.wordpress.com>.

²⁸ Andrew Mark Bennett, “JVP’s Anti-Semitic Obsession With Jewish Power,” *Forward*, January 9, 2018, <https://forward.com/opinion/391783/jvps-anti-semitic-obsession-with-jewish-power>; “Judith Butler on Hamas, Hezbollah & the Israel Lobby (2006),” *Radical Archives*, March 28, 2010, <https://radicalarchives.org/2010/03/28/jbutler-on-hamas-hezbollah-israel-lobby>.

²⁹ It should be noted that there are a variety of views within Hamas on issues like this, and Hamas stated this was not the organization’s ideology. However, his views represent a current inside the organization. “Senior member of Gaza’s Islamist rulers encourages killing ‘every Jew possible,’” *News.com.au*, July 16, 2019, www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/senior-member-of-gazas-islamist-rulers-encourages-killing-every-jew-possible/news-story/9190675857a2fbaafcecd7ec2f90ef73.

³⁰ Katha Pollitt, “The Case of Julian Assange,” *Nation*, December 22, 2010, www.thenation.com/article/case-julian-assange.

³¹ Ali Abunimah and Hussein Ibish, “Serious Concerns about Israeli Shamir,” *NigelParry.com*, April 16, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060615025601/www.nigelparry.com/issues/shamir/originalletter.html>; Tor Bach, Sven Johansen, and Lise

Apfelblum, "Israeli writer is Swedish anti-Semite," *Searchlight*, May 2004,
<http://web.archive.org/web/20110329054749/http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=6>; David Leigh and Luke Harding, "Holocaust denier in charge of handling Moscow cables," *Guardian*, January 31, 2011,
www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/31/wikileaks-holocaust-denier-handled-moscow-cables. See also Will Yakowicz, "His Jewish Problem, Part 1," *Tablet*, May 16, 2011, www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/67305/his-jewish-problem; and "His Jewish Problem, Part 2," May 17, 2011, www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/67307/his-jewish-problem-2.

³² "Greg Johnson Interviews Gilad Atzmon," October 5, 2016, *Counter-Currents*,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20161008123139/https://www.counter-currents.com/2016/10/interview-with-gilad-atzmon-2>.

³³ "Granting No Quarter: A Call for the Disavowal of the Racism and Antisemitism of Gilad Atzmon," *US Palestinian Community Network*, March 13, 2012, <http://uspcn.org/2012/03/13/granting-no-quarter-a-call-for-the-disavowal-of-the-racism-and-antisemitism-of-gilad-atzmon>; "Not Quite "Ordinary Human Beings"—Anti-imperialism and the anti-humanist rhetoric of Gilad Atzmon," *Three Way Fight*, March 2012, http://threewayfight.blogspot.com/p/atzmon-critique_09.html.

³⁴ Adam Horowitz and Philip Weiss, "Roundtable on the Palestinian solidarity movement and Alison Weir," *Mondoweiss*, August 12, 2015, <https://mondoweiss.net/2015/08/roundtable-palestinian-solidarity>. (Unsurprisingly, the pro-antisemitism argument attacks me by name.)

³⁵ Michael Neumann, "What is Anti-Semitism?," in Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, eds., *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (Oakland: CounterPunch/AK Press), 2003, 12. The anthology also includes Jeffrey Blankfort and Lenni Brenner—both Jewish anti-Zionists who have deployed antisemitism in their criticisms of Zionism—as well as CIA spooks-turned-conspiracy theorists Kathy and Bill Christison. Just to top it off, it includes an essay by St. Clair about the 1967 attack on the *USS Liberty*—a perennial favorite of antisemitic conspiracy theorists and neo-Nazis. Shamefully, the anthology is still in print on AK Press.

³⁶ David Smith, "Jewish group criticizes Trent prof," *Peterborough Examiner*, August 18, 2003,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20070927230145/http://www.cjc.ca/template.php?action=itn&Story=391>.

³⁷ Michael Staudenmaier and Rami El-Amine, "The Three Way Fight

Debate,” *Upping the Anti* #5, November 19, 2009, <https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/05-the-three-way-fight-debate>; Matthew Lyons, “Defending the Three Way Fight Perspective” (letter to the editor), *Upping the Anti* #6, October 26, 2009, <https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/06-defending-the-three-way-fight-perspective>; C. Alexander, “A short reply to the Anti-Imperialist and Three-Way-Fight Approaches to Antisemitism, in the Upping-the-Anti Journal Debate,” *Three Way Fight*, September 14, 2008, <http://threewayfight.blogspot.com/2008/09/short-reply-to-anti-imperialist-and.html>.

³⁸ Zack Beauchamp, “Ilhan Omar’s tweet revealed core truths about anti-Semitism in America,” *Vox*, February 12, 2019, www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/2/12/18220241/ilhan-omars-twitter-tweet-anti-semitism; “A guide to Labour Party anti-Semitism claims,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2019, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45030552; “U.K. Chief Rabbi Denounces Labour Party on Anti-Semitism,” *New York Times*, November 26, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/world/europe/chief-rabbi-labour-jeremy-corbryn.html.

³⁹ Michael Pugliese, “Fwd: [DAN-Labor] WTO Wall Street Mailing List,” June 9, 2001, <http://mailman.lbo-talk.org/2001/2001-June/011171.html>.

⁴⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 266. While Brinkley downplays Coughlin’s antisemitism, Bradley W. Hart—in *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2018), 86—argues that Coughlin “antisemitizes” his narrative at the moment when antisemitism is at its height of popularity in the prewar United States. This, of course, is part of the ever-present concern that criticisms of finance capital and conspiracy theories, which already occupy the narrative ground of antisemitism, can turn into it at a moment’s notice. How often this has happened—as it did with Coughlin—is worthy of further research. Imagine what would happen if Donald Trump’s use of coded antisemitic language and narratives openly targeted Jews.

⁴¹ Spencer Sunshine, “The Right Hand of Occupy Wall Street From Libertarians to Nazis, the Fact and Fiction of Right-Wing Involvement,” *Political Research Associates*, February 24, 2014, www.politicalresearch.org/2014/02/23/the-right-hand-of-occupy-wall-street-from-libertarians-to-nazis-the-fact-and-fiction-of-right-wing-involvement; Sunshine, “20 on the Right in Occupy,” *Political Research*

Associates, February 13, 2014,

www.politicalresearch.org/2014/02/13/20-right-occupy.

⁴² Brian Klug lays out this argument in “The Collective Jew: Israel and the New Antisemitism,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2003, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0031322032000087973.

⁴³ For Malcolm X, see Lawrence B. Goodheart, “The Ambivalent Antisemitism of Malcolm X,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 28, no. 1, 3–35. For example, regarding the Holocaust, Malcolm X said the “Jews brought it on themselves.” For the Black Panther Party, see Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Socialism of Fools,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1971, www.nytimes.com/1971/01/03/archives/-the-socialism-of-fools-the-new-left-calls-it-antizionism-but-its.html.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Wright, “Should You Attend the Women's March? It's a flawed march, but it exists in an even more flawed country,” *Harpers Bazaar*, January 16, 2019, www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a25920871/womens-march-controversy-explained-louis-farrakhan.

⁴⁵ Grace Lee Boggs, a lifelong radical whose 70 years of activism included advising Malcolm X, used to lecture me: “Spencer, you have an obligation to criticize people of color you disagree with!” You can listen to the opinions of groups that are oppressed, and give them special weight in terms of what they say; but all people can be carriers of oppressive ideas—even oppressed people.

⁴⁶ Steve Cohen, *That's Funny You Don't Look Antisemitic*, nd, <http://you-dont-look-anti-semitic.blogspot.com>; originally published 1984.

⁴⁷ Bakunin, for example, is cited many times on *Stormfront*; for example, see Paryan, “Michael Bakunin on Marx and Rothschild,” *Stormfront*, September 24, 2008, www.stormfront.org/forum/t525579.

⁴⁸ J. Salwyn Schapiro, “Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 4 (July 1945), 736; www.jstor.org/stable/1842699.

⁴⁹ Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism,” *Autodidact Project*, www.autodidactproject.org/other/postone1.html, original published 1986; and Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America* (New York: Guilford, 2000). A pitch perfect example of a left-wing attack on finance capital which leaves industrial capital free from criticism is Michael Moore's 2009 film *Capitalism: A Love Story*, which goes so far as to associate “good” industrial capital with Christianity. Unsurprisingly, it was (correctly) called out for close links with antisemitic thought.

⁵⁰ “Anti-Civ,” short for “anti-civilization, is a loose school of thought that spread in the ‘00s in the U.S. anarchist scene. Essentially a softer form of anarcho-primitivism, it follows a long tradition of radical anti-modernism and is a critique of industrial society, alienation, and representation. It remains of some influence in the insurrectionist scene. Within this tradition, Israel is sometimes portrayed as the vanguard of “European civilization” pushing into the Middle East, breaking up “indigenous,” communitarian Palestinian society. The influence of neo-Splengerian historian Arnold Toynbee can be seen here.

⁵¹ Spencer Sunshine, “Drawing Lines against Racism and Fascism,” *Political Research Associates*, March 5, 2015, www.politicalresearch.org/2015/03/05/drawing-lines-against-racism-and-fascism.

⁵² Spencer Sunshine, “A Guide to Who’s Coming to the Largest White Nationalist Rally in a Decade,” *Political Research Associates*, August 10, 2017, www.politicalresearch.org/2017/08/10/a-guide-to-whos-coming-to-the-largest-white-nationalist-rally-in-a-decade.

⁵³ Colin Moynihan and Ali Winston, “Far-Right Proud Boys Reeling After Arrests and Scrutiny,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/12/23/nyregion/gavin-mcinnis-proud-boys-nypd.html; “Proud Boy Leader & Unite the Right Attendee Behind ‘Antifa’ Petition,” *It’s Going Down*, August 1, 2019, <https://itsgoingdown.org/proud-boy-leader-behind-petition>; Christina Caron, “Charlottesville Attacker Gets Nearly 4 Years in Prison for Beating of Black Man,” January 8, 2019, *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2019/01/08/us/daniel-borden-deandre-harris-charlottesville.html; Gabriela Resto-Montero, “With the rise of the alt-right, Latino white supremacy may not be a contradiction in terms,” *Mic*, December 27, 2017, www.mic.com/articles/187062/with-the-rise-of-the-alt-right-latino-white-supremacy-may-not-be-a-contradiction-in-terms.

⁵⁴ The statement read in part: “This weekend, white supremacist groups will host rallies in Shelbyville and Murfreesboro. While Black Lives Matter Nashville (BLMN) understands why it is important to counter-protest these types of gatherings, BLMN will not participate in any counter-protest. We believe that gatherings of neo-Nazis and Klansmen like these distract us from the destructive ways systemic white supremacy rallies against the lives of black and brown folks in Middle Tennessee and this country every day..... we believe that these rallies are times for white people to step up.... It is white America who invited them in, and it is white America who has the responsibility to see them out.” “Black Lives Matter organizers won’t take part in counterprotests,”

Daily News Journal, October 27, 2017, www.dnj.com/story/news/local/2017/10/27/black-lives-matter-organizers-wont-take-part-counter-protests/808375001.

The SONG statement says, “This prayer is for our Southern kin – who we love, who we choose and those who have come before us.” SONG supports “hundreds of years of resistance, struggle, burying of what is sacred, reading the stars, fists raised high, and clasped hands in the streets fighting for Black, people of color, indigenous, immigrant, Latinx, queer and trans communities to live in full dignity, to live free from fear.” “#DefendCville: A Prayer for Our Southern Kin,” *Southerners on New Ground*, August 13, 2017, <https://southernersonnewground.org/a-prayer-for-our-southern-kin>.

⁵⁵ “Beyond Anti-fascism, But Not Without It,” *Institute for Anarchist Studies*, December 20, 2017, <https://anarchiststudies.org/beyond-anti-fascism-but-not-without-it>. The CfP was so heavily criticized that it was withdrawn and reissued, complete with a defensive response; it remained deeply inadequate. “Beyond Anti-Fascism Reflection,” *Institute for Anarchist Studies*, June 5, 2018, <https://anarchiststudies.org/beyond-anti-fascism-reflection>.

⁵⁶ Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2017), vi.

⁵⁷ Yair Rosenberg, “‘Jews will not replace us’: Why white supremacists go after Jews,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews; Emma Green, “Why the Charlottesville Marchers Were Obsessed With Jews Anti-Semitic logic fueled the violence over the weekend, no matter what the president says,” *Atlantic*, August 15, 2017, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928; Phoebe Maltz Bovy, “The Left’s Blind Spot: Antisemitism,” *New Republic*, August 17, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144393/lefts-blind-spot-anti-semitism>.

⁵⁸ Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), 168. See also 67, 69, 127, and 163–64.

⁵⁹ Spencer Sunshine, “Steve Bannon’s ‘Washed Out’ Antisemitism,” *Political Research Associates*, January 12, 2018, www.politicalresearch.org/2018/01/12/steve-bannons-washed-out-antisemitism.

⁶⁰ Jewish history is complex and largely ignored, not just by the Left but in general in histories of the West. Although anti-Jewish commentary

can be found going back to the ancient Greeks, Laqueur posits conspiratorial religious antisemitism as starting with the First Crusade (1096) and having a major resurgence when Jews are blamed for the Black Plague (1348–49). Jews were expelled from many European countries, including England (1290), Belgium (1261), France (1306 and 1394), and Spain (1492), to give just a few examples. The first Jewish ghetto was established in Italy in 1516, and the last one abolished in 1870. European Jews attained full civil rights in many countries starting with the Napoleonic edicts; but many of these freedoms were reversed after his fall from power, and in the Western countries Jewish freedom only came with the 1848 revolutions. In Russia, Jews only attained full civil rights after the overthrow of the Tsar by the Provisional Government in February 1917. (For a personal comparison to what might look like distant history to readers: my grandparents were born around this time, and my parents were born as the Holocaust was ongoing.) Large Jewish populations fled Western European antisemitism in the Middle Ages, escaping to Eastern Europe, where they lived until the pogroms forced many to migrate once again, including to Palestine (then part of the Ottoman Empire) and the United States. Today there are few Jews in Eastern Europe; while some live in Britain and France, the vast majority live in the United States and Israel. See Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

There is also a long history of Jews in the Muslim lands, in addition to historical populations in Ethiopia, India, and China. Some of the early Zionists were from Yemen, where Jews had long suffered intense persecution.

⁶¹ That is: Is “white” a racial category that can be found in one’s biology—a claim that scientists dismiss today, but most racists still hold to? Or is it about one’s appearance—does one “look white”? Or is it a matter of where historically your ancestors are from? For example, many “white-passing” people in Turkey or the Asian side of the Caucasus are considered “not white” since they are not from the European continent, while a South African of British or Dutch descent, whose family has lived in Africa for generations, is still “white.”

⁶² The Allies could have stopped the Holocaust by bombing the transportation systems that led to the camps—or the camps themselves. They declined to.

⁶³ While not usually said out loud by the movement, this position is the logical conclusion of certain decolonization politics, and can be heard in activist circles. See, for example, Rowland “Enaemaehkiw” Keshena

Robinson, “The ABC of Decolonization,” *It Must Be Relinquished*, May 16, 2016, <https://onkwehonwerising.wordpress.com/2016/05/16/the-abcs-of-decolonization>. Robinson says the idea that the idea that “white/settler/masters have an inherent right to at least possess some of the land...is in fact simply a more insidious form of settler colonialism.” See also “‘Tribes’ of Europe—Why Decolonize?” *Unsettling America*, November 8, 2013, <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2013/11/08/tribes-of-europe-why-decolonize>.

⁶⁴ What happens is that white identity politicians quietly accept antisemitism the vast majority of the time, and this includes many Jews. This leaves a small minority—naturally, almost all are Jewish—who will not accept this to carry out what is a bound-to-lose role: being a white person challenging a person of color, who is invoking a widely-accepted protocol—which says that white people have no right to counter people of color on the matter at hand.

⁶⁵ The “identity politics protocols” as we know them today (2019) emerged from long discussions in the Left about gender, race, and other types of identity—but most directly from critiques coming out of the New Left in the 1970s. At this time, many elements of the Black Nationalist movement became mired in antisemitism, and were strongly criticized by white leftists—especially Jews. It seems likely that the current-day protocols prohibit white people from criticizing people of color may have emerged, at least in part, as a justification to silence these same criticisms of antisemitism during what was a high point for the number of people of color to be involved in the U.S. radical Left. Further research into this contentious period, and particularly on Black Nationalist antisemitism which was widespread in the 1970s, would help shed light on this question.

⁶⁶ George H.W. Bush’s 1990 comments about the coming, U.S.-dominated “New World Order” gave rise to endless books on the Right, including a book of the same name by Christian evangelist Pat Robertson. The militia movement in particular was fixated on conspiracy theories. Parts of the Left, too, became entranced by with them, as did the d.i.y. fanzine and “slacker” culture, fed by presses like Disinformation, Feral House, and Loompanics—all which published or distributed fascist texts. This feed into left-conspiratorial readings of the anti-globalization movement, 9/11 “Truth,” and conspiratorial anti-zionism and anti-neoliberalism. These ideas are still going strong and found a home today in places like the U.S. Green Party. Conspiratorial thinking provides a bridge between the Left and Right. For 1990s and

earlier groups, see Chip Berlet, "Right Woos Left," *Political Research Associates*, February 27, 1999,

www.politicalresearch.org/1999/02/27/right-woos-left.

⁶⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952/2008), 101.

⁶⁸ The Livingstone Formulation was developed by David Hirsh. It is based on an incident where British Labour Party politician Ken Livingston harassed a Jewish reporter by calling him a Nazi during an exchange that had nothing to do with Israel/Palestine. When this became a scandal in the press, Livingston claimed he was being targeted because of his Palestine solidarity work. David Hirsh, "The Livingstone Formulation," *Engage*, April 29, 2016,

<https://engageonline.wordpress.com/2016/04/29/the-livingstone-formulation-david-hirsh-2>.

⁶⁹ Spencer Sunshine, "How to be a Left-Wing Apologist for Antisemitism," *Vitam Fracta*, August 15, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161115035219/https://vitamfracta.com/2016/08/15/how-to-be-a-left-wing-apologist-for-antisemitism>.

⁷⁰ This is by no means a thorough survey, but does include common code words and synecdoches in use these days. They fall into several categories:

Banking: Soros, "Sorosism," Rothschilds, Bilderbergers, international bankers, central bankers and the Federal Reserve, Wall Street, Globalization, neoliberal economic elites, financiers, merchants, globalists/globalist elites, banksters, usurers

Exploitation and murder: Shylocks, pimps, organ harvesters, baby-eaters, well-poisoners, money-lenders, money-changers

Clannish group: The Tribe or tribal, chosen people, cabalists

Anti-Christian: Christ killers, children of Cain, Synagogue of Satan

Internationalists: rootless cosmopolitans, neocons, New World Order, Trilateral Commission, Tavistock Institute, wandering Jews, One World Government.

"Secret Elites": illuminati, string-pullers, puppet masters, ZOG (Zionist Occupied Government), plutocrats, Bohemian Grove, "The Insiders"

Agents of Israel: "Zionists," "Israel Lobby" or the "Jewish Lobby," "dual loyalties," Mossad, Zionazis

As Leftists: Cultural Marxism or the Frankfurt School, Trotskyites, Communists, Judeo-Bolsheviks

Identified by location: Hollywood, Khazars, North London elite, Golders Green, New York, Wall Street, East Coast, Coastal elites, "cultural elites," coasties, Brandeis students

Religious: Hebrews, kritarchy

The name that can't be said: "them," "gewisse Kreise" (certain circles), "our overlords," "Our Ancient Friends," "the noses" (die Nasen), and the use of the (((echoes symbol)))

Family names are also an important part of a coded identification. Either the speaker emphasizes the Jewish name ("Soros"); strongly enunciates part of the last name (e.g., "Stein" or "Berg"); or intentionally points out that a name someone uses is different than their given, identifiably Jewish, family name ("Leon Trotsky, real *name Lev Bronstein*").

⁷¹ Sartre wrote, "Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words. The anti-Semites have the right to play. They even like to play with discourse for, by giving ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutors. They delight in acting in bad faith, since they seek not to persuade by sound argument but to intimidate and disconcert. If you press them too closely, they will abruptly fall silent, loftily indicating by some phrase that the time for argument is past." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948/1969), 20.

⁷² Among other things, this consists of refusing to acknowledge facts like: attempts by Zionist binationalists to find Arab partners before 1948; the role that antisemitism played in shaping the specific kind of anti-Zionism found in Palestine and surrounding countries, particularly in Egypt during the build-up to the 1967 war; the massacre of Jewish civilians both before and during the 1948 war by Palestinian factions; that at various times the British both aggressively prevented Jews from entering Palestine (including during the Holocaust), and banned land sales to them; that Jews are indigenous to Israel and have had an unbroken presence there since antiquity; and sometimes even omitting that Arab leaders rejected the original 1947 UN partition plan, which would have created a separate Palestinian state from the get-go. All of these, for example, are omitted by the history provided by If Americans Knew. This antisemitic project's easy-to-consume propaganda is shared widely on progressive platforms, including by the official Occupy Wall Street social media accounts. If Americans Knew, "A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict,"

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180301113631/http://ifamericaknew.org/history>.

⁷³ The bartender, at what used to be my regular spot, wore a Palestinian flag t-shirt to work once, and so I struck up a conversation with him about it. He told me he had several weeks in the West Bank doing solidarity work. I asked if there was a specific party or political movement he supported (I was thinking about this because one of my other friends at the time was a DFLP supporter). He gave me a confused look and slowly said, “Well...I know that there *are* different political parties”—but he couldn’t even name one. He was a nice guy, who I am sure was sincere in his convictions, and nothing led me to believe that he was motivated by problematic views. A recent survey by a Berkeley professor found similar results. Ron E. Hassner, “Passion, ignorance, and teaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” *Times of Israel*, November 25, 2019, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/passion-ignorance-and-teaching-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

⁷⁴ Interestingly, Stalin wrote the definition in 1913 partly to sideline a rival revolutionary socialist faction, the Jewish Labor Bund, and not so much not to delegitimize Zionists, although it did that as well. Of the seven sections of the essay, the fifth (“The Bund, It’s Nationalism, Its Separatism”) is dedicated to attacking the Bund. Zionism, in comparison, received a few sentences. J.V. Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm.

⁷⁵ “Modern Jewish History: Pogroms,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, nd, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pogroms-2.

⁷⁶ “The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States,” *From Marx To Mao*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180605194435/www.marx2mao.com/Other/CR75.html>. African-Americans, of course, did not possess a separate language.

⁷⁷ Olaf Kistenmacher, “From ‘Jewish Capital’ to the ‘Jewish-Fascist Legion in Jerusalem’: The Development of Antizionism in the German Communist Party (KPD) in the Weimar Republic, 1925-1933,” *Engage Journal* #3, September 2006, <https://engageonline.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/from-jewish-capital-to-the-jewish-fascist-legion-in-jerusalem-the-development-of-antizionism-in-the-german-communist-party-kpd-in-the-weimar-republic-1925-1933/>

⁷⁸ Paul Lewis, “U.N. Repeals Its ‘75 Resolution Equating Zionism With Racism,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1991, www.nytimes.com/1991/12/17/world/un-repeals-its-75-resolution-equating-zionism-with-racism.html

⁷⁹ This argument occurred on a NYC-centered anarchist listserv which would like to remain anonymous; email in possession of author.

⁸⁰ Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972/1989), 218–19, 221, 584.

⁸¹ Cited in Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism*, 8.

⁸² The Palestinian and Israeli casualties cover the period between January 24, 2008 and August 23, 2019; “Data on casualties,” *OCHA - Occupied Palestinian Territories*, accessed October 22, 2019, www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties. For the Ukrainian conflict, see “Death Toll Up To 13,000 In Ukraine Conflict, Says UN Rights Office,” *Radio Free Europe*, February 26, 2019, www.rferl.org/a/death-toll-up-to-13-000-in-ukraine-conflict-says-un-rights-office/29791647.html.

⁸³ During the period of 1947–49, around 700,000 Palestinians fled what later became the boundaries of the new Israeli state, and after the fighting, were not allowed to return. Historians still argue about how this happened. Reasons offered include expulsions by the Zionist armies; flights after both real massacres and in response to rumors of massacres, sometimes intentionally spread; and as a response to calls by Arab political groups who urged that Palestinians flee. It is my position that that the reason the civilians fled the warzone is irrelevant; it is the denial of their right to return after the fighting that is the main issue. The so-called “New Historians,” including Tom Segev and Benny Morris, have examined these issues, although they remain highly contentious.

⁸⁴ The “Right of Return” would allow all Palestinians—and their descendants—who were expelled in 1948 to return to Israel. Combined with the Arab population that are existing Israeli citizens, this would abolish the numerical majority of Jewish population, and theoretically allow Israel to be dismantled as a Jewish state. Therefore, the Right of Return is a dividing line between those who want to see the conflict resolved but insist on Israel remaining, in any borders, as a Jewish state; and those who either oppose that, or simply do not insist on it. The BDS calls include the Right of Return which is the primary source of hostility by the U.S. organized Jewish community towards it, and why it is widely labeled as antisemitic. David M. Halbfinger, Michael Wines and Steven Erlanger, “Is B.D.S. Anti-Semitic? A Closer Look at the Boycott Israel Campaign,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/07/27/world/middleeast/bds-israel-boycott-antisemitic.html.

⁸⁵ Jewish migration to Israel from the Muslim countries—which, excepting Iran, is almost complete—happened over a period of decades and through a mix of expulsions, voluntary migrations, and pushes from

the Israeli government. Like many topics broached here, it is beyond the scope of this essay to address this contentious topic.

⁸⁶ Historically, black “national self-determination” was a term for the right to form a separate racial state in areas where black folks were the majority—usually the “black belt” in the South. This position, championed by U.S. black nationalists and held by the U.S. Communist Party from 1928 to the 1950s, was then revived in the 1960s by both black nationalists and many in the larger New Left. See Max Shachtman, *Race and Reason* (London: Verso, 2003), and especially the long introduction by Christopher Phelps. For the influence of this on the U.S. New Left, see Marx Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002)). This “right” still widely held by left intellectuals and activists from the black nationalist and Marxist-Leninist traditions. Similarly, today a small—but vocal—subset of decolonization activists proclaim that Native people have the right to expel “settlers” from their historic territory.

⁸⁷ In 1968, Cleaver wrote “The parallel between the situation of the Jews at the time of the coming of Theodore Herzl and the present situation of black people in America is fascinating. The Jews had no homeland and were dispersed around the world, cooped up in the ghettos of Europe. Functionally, a return to Israel seemed as impractical as obtaining a homeland for Afro-American now seems. The facts of history show that the Jews were able to do precisely the same thing that Afro-Americans must now do.” Eldridge Cleaver, *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* (New York: Ramparts/Vintage, 1969), pp. 67–69; <https://radicalarchives.org/2012/08/13/black-nationalism-equals-zionism>. Cleaver’s view was by no means unique; this position had long been held by both black nationalists and pan-Africanists. Toks Adewale, who wrote *Pan-Africanism and Zionism: Political Movements in Polarity* (Chicago: Research Associates and Frontline Dist., 1995) to emphasize the difference between the movements, ends up giving copious historical evidence of Pan-Africanist support for Zionism, and makes a strong case for their similarities. Adewale’s examples include W.E.B. DuBois (“The African movement means to us what the Zionist movement must mean to Jews,” 3); Marcus Garvey (“Our obsession is like that of the Jews. They are working for Palestine. We are working for Africa,” 4); George Padmore (who called Garveyism “Black Zionism,” 5); and Paul Robeson (who “in 1948...stated that he would travel to Palestine to sing for the Jewish troops in their fight against the Arabs,” 8).

⁸⁸ Laqueur, *History of Zionism*, 215–17, 250–51, 262–63.

⁸⁹ Hannah Arendt, "Prophetic Warning," *Marxists Internet Archive*, nd, www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/534.html. Original from 1945.

⁹⁰ Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism*, 140.

⁹¹ There certainly is a much stronger argument for labeling the 1967 seizure of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights as "imperialism." However, as far as I can tell, the term is not used in this more limited way, but applies directly to the establishment of Israel itself in 1948.

⁹² "Manichean" is a perspective that sees the world as a divided into two parts; they are not just competing sides, but actually represent a struggle between Good and Evil. There are both Zionists and anti-Zionists—and anti-imperialists and advocates of U.S. global domination—who see the world this way. For each of them, the other is the "Evil" and they are the "Good."

⁹³ For a short overview of the change in perspective from Marx and Engels, especially between the 1850s and after *Capital*, see Spencer A. Leonard, "Marx at the margins: An interview with Kevin Anderson," *Platypus Review* #44, March 2012, <http://platypus1917.org/2012/03/01/marx-at-the-margins-kevin-anderson>.

⁹⁴ Eugene's Pacifica Forum became infamous for this, and influenced Far Right entyrism in Oregon for many years, including Portland's Tim Calvert. Sonia Scherr, "Movement to Boot Pacifica Forum Off Oregon Campus Gains Steam," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, January 14, 2010, www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2010/01/14/movement-boot-pacifica-forum-oregon-campus-gains-steam.

⁹⁵ "The Holocaust: The Mufti and the Führer (November 1941)," *Jewish Virtual Library*, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-mufti-and-the-f-uuml-hrer. The history of the post-war relationships between the NSDAP diaspora and neo-Nazis on one hand, and Palestinian and other regional political groups on the other, is a complicated political hot potato that has not yet received a full scholarly treatment. A good starting place is Kevin Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1999).

⁹⁶ Cited in Cohen, *That's Funny You Don't Look Antisemitic*, 41.

⁹⁷ Roland Evans and Robert Novak, "Moscow vs Zionism," "World Front" syndicated column, November 14-15, 1976. This is republished, with similar examples, as part of "1970s Soviet Antisemitism," <https://radicalarchives.org/2019/11/15/1970s-soviet-antisemitism>.

⁹⁸ Izabella Tabarovsky, "Soviet Anti-Zionism and Contemporary Left Antisemitism," *Fathom*, May 2019, <http://fathomjournal.org/soviet-anti-zionism-and-contemporary-left-antisemitism>; Daniel Schatz,

“Remembering the Sweeping Expulsion of Poland's Jews—23 Years After the Holocaust,” *Newsweek*, September 12, 2019, www.newsweek.com/poland-expelled-jews-decades-after-holocaust-1458966; Simon Gansinger, “Communists Against Jews: the Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland in 1968,” *Fathom*, Autumn 2016, <http://fathomjournal.org/communists-against-jews-the-anti-zionist-campaign-in-poland-in-1968>; Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948–1953* (New York : HarperCollins, 2003); Dave Rich, *The Left's Jewish Problem* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016), chapter 1.

These events were not lost on Western Nazis. The 1952 Prague Trials helped convince fascist theoretician Francis Parker Yockey that the Communists had come to embrace antisemitic racial nationalism, and so he advocated that neo-Nazis should ally with them. See Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, 265–67.

The story of the Nazi influence on the Islamist movement is told in Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (New York: Telos Publishing, 2007) and Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). For an anti-zionist analysis on this, see Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust* (New York: Metropolitan, 2009).

⁹⁹ “A portrait of Chomsky as a young Zionist: Noam Chomsky interviewed by Gabriel Matthew Schivone, *New Voices*, November 7, 2011,” *Chomsky.Info*, <https://chomsky.info/20111107>.

¹⁰⁰ One could add many more to Frank's list. His ten are: 1) For antisemites, “Zionism” is a synonym for Jewish; 2) for some “Jewish Fundamentalists,” it's the biblical promise of the ancient Jewish lands to Jews; 3) for Jewish fundamentalists, Zionism is a secular—and profane—project of restoring what only the messiah can do; 4) for many Marxists, it's a form of imperialism; 5) for socialist-zionists, it's an anti-imperialist project; 6) for Jewish autonomists like Simon Dubnow, it was a non-nationalist attempt to create autonomous communities; 7) for Jews fleeing antisemitic persecution, it was simply a Jewish-controlled place to escape to; 8) for “Jewish Nationalists,” it “is the National Liberation Movement of the Jewish people.”; 9) to some Palestinians, Zionism is just the action of the Israeli state; 10) “To the confused and befuddled, Zionism is merely the actions of a particular Israeli government. Anti-Zionism merely meaning ‘against these policies’ and this particular government.” Benjamin Franks, *Political Entropy in the Jewish*

Diaspora (pamphlet), (London: Pentagon/Institute for Comparative Boredom, 1992).

¹⁰¹ The “Alt Lite” is the more mainstream wing of the Alt Right, and it allows in gay men, Jews, and people of color. Prominent Jews include Laura Loomer and Ben Shapiro; Milo Yiannopoulos also is very public about being of Jewish descent.

¹⁰² For example, see Abigail R. Esman, “Proud To Be An Anti-Semite,” *Forbes*, www.forbes.com/sites/abigailesman/2010/11/08/gretta-duisenberg-proud-to-be-an-anti-semite.

¹⁰³ For more on this, see two long overviews: “An Investigation Into Red-Brown Alliances: Third Positionism, Russia, Ukraine, Syria, And The Western Left,” *Ravings of a Radical Vagabond*, January 15, 2018, <https://ravingsofaradicalvagabond.noblogs.org/post/2018/01/15/an-investigation-into-red-brown-alliances>; as well as Chip Berlet, “Right Woos Left,” *Political Research Associates*, www.politicalresearch.org/1999/02/27/right-woos-left.

¹⁰⁴ The most well-known figure from this lineage was Reagan cabinet member Jeane Kirkpatrick. Jacob Heilbrunn, “They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of The Neocons,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2008, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/theyknewtheywereright.htm. See also John P. Diggins, *Up from Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975).

¹⁰⁵ Mathilde Frot, “Jewish academic quits Labour: ‘I’m done and most other Jews are done too’,” *Jewish News*, February 21, 2019, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/jewish-academic-quits-labour-im-done-and-most-other-jews-are-done-too>. The renunciation of socialism is from David Hirsh, “If Only,” *Perspective*, March 6, 2019, <http://journal.quilliaminternational.com/2019/03/06/if-only>.

¹⁰⁶ Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness, *A Small Key Can Open A Large Door: The Rojava Revolution*, 2015, 22–26. This passage on the structure of the councils specifies that, “There are specific local councils for each ethnic group and religious organization,” 26.

¹⁰⁷ The IWW had no separate analysis of racial oppression, but its real-world commitment to organize all workers, specifically including the worst off, helped make it a multi-racial organization—at a time when it was common for U.S. unions to refuse black members. Patrick Renshaw estimated that at one point 10% of the IWW was black. Native Americans and Latinos also played prominent roles in the union. See Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 140.

¹⁰⁸ Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*, 3.

Who's Afraid of the Frankfurt School? “Cultural Marxism” as an Antisemitic Conspiracy Theory

Joan Braune¹

This article argues that “Cultural Marxism” is an antisemitic conspiracy theory, by drawing from three of the main proponents of the theory in the United States today. According to the conspiracy theory, the Jewish Marxists of the Frankfurt School implemented a slow takeover of “culture,” seeking to undermine Christianity, family, and nation in favor of a new worldview and system of control, involving mass immigration, sexual liberation, and moral and aesthetic decline. Cultural Marxists, the conspiracy theorists believe, now control all areas of public life, including the media, schools, entertainment, the economy, and national and global systems of governance. Not only does this theory vastly overestimate the influence of a small group of intellectuals, the conspiracy theory trades on the Frankfurt School’s perceived Jewishness and amplifies antisemitic tropes. This article focuses on three of the main proponents of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory—white nationalist Kevin MacDonald and self-titled paleo-conservatives William S. Lind and Paul Gottfried—showing how the work of each on the Frankfurt School amplifies antisemitic tropes and engages in conspiracy thinking that misrepresents the Frankfurt School’s ideas and influence. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

It was Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Breivik, who killed over seventy people in a car bombing and mass shooting of children in 2011, who first brought the term “Cultural Marxism” to the world’s attention in his thousand-some paged statement of belief, which focused almost entirely on the concept. In fact, the theory of “Cultural Marxism” appears to have inspired a number of other white supremacist terrorists since then, including the alleged shooter in the attack on a synagogue in Poway, California in spring of 2019, who killed one and injured three others.²

According to the theory of “Cultural Marxism,” a group of Jewish Marxists called the Frankfurt School have profoundly reshaped society and public opinion; deciding to abandon the original Marxist goal of an international working-class revolution, they sought to implement socialism through a slow, creeping takeover of “culture.” Under such names as “political correctness” and “multiculturalism,” so the theory goes, “Cultural Marxists” indoctrinated and shamed “the West” into abandoning Christianity, family, and nation in favor of a new worldview and system of control, involving mass immigration, sexual liberation, and moral and aesthetic decline. According to this theory, Cultural Marxism has won, and its opponents are hardscrabble, disinherited outsiders struggling to reclaim their Western, Christian heritage. The Cultural Marxists, they believe, now control all areas of public life, including the media, schools, entertainment, the economy, and national and global systems of government.

In actuality, the Frankfurt School was a relatively small group of mostly ethnically Jewish Marxist scholars who advanced an interdisciplinary critique to capitalism. These scholars sought to understand why the revolution predicted by traditional Marxist thought had not yet happened in Western Europe, where it seemed to have been stymied by forces including nationalism, bureaucracy, consumerism, and fascism. Among the names associated with the Frankfurt School are Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal, Franz Neumann, and Otto Kirchheimer. When the Nazis came to power, the Frankfurt School left Germany for the United States and reestablished itself in New York at Columbia University. Although the Frankfurt School’s “Institute for Social Research” exists to this day (now located again in Germany), the broader intellectual movement they

² Paul Rosenberg, “A User’s Guide to ‘Cultural Marxism,’” *Salon*, May 5, 2019, <https://www.salon.com/2019/05/05/a-users-guide-to-cultural-marxism-antisemitic-conspiracy-theory-reloaded/>.

founded is known as “Critical Theory.”

Although some members of the Frankfurt School had cultural influence—in particular, some books by Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse were influential on some activists on the New Left in the 1960s—“Cultural Marxism” conspiracy theories greatly exaggerate the Frankfurt School’s influence and power. Furthermore, there is no academic field known as “Cultural Marxism.” Scholars of the Frankfurt School are called Critical Theorists, not Cultural Marxists. Scholars in various other fields that often get lumped into the “Cultural Marxist” category, such as postmodernists and feminist scholars, also do not generally call their fields of study Cultural Marxism, nor do they share perfect ideological symmetry with Critical Theory. The term does appear very occasionally in Marxist literature, but there is no pattern of using it to point specifically to the Frankfurt School—Marxist philosopher of aesthetics Frederic Jameson, for example, uses the term, but his use of the term “cultural” refers to his aesthetics, not to a specific commitment to the Frankfurt School. In short, Cultural Marxism does not exist—not only is the conspiracy theory version false, but there is no intellectual movement by that name.³

Although not all versions of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory overtly stress the Jewishness of the Frankfurt School, Cultural Marxism relies on a variety of antisemitic tropes, applying antisemitic conspiracy tropes to the Frankfurt School. The Cultural Marxism theory resembles some past antisemitic conspiracy theories that continue to have influence today.⁴ This includes the theory of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” according to which the Russian (Bolshevik) revolution was a conspiracy by Jewish bankers, and the forged document, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*,⁵ according to which the Jews, together with the Masons, were involved in a conspiracy to “enslave Christian civilization under a new world order.”⁶

³ Lately some Jewish leftists on social media are joking that they are “Cultural Marxists” in response to increased use of the slur. This use of the term should be understood for what it is: a reclaiming of identity from bigots, not an expression of belief in the conspiracy or a commitment to an actual school of thought called “cultural Marxism.”

⁴ This theory, like theories about the Protocols of Zion, is very much alive and well. It is even promoted by a recent Russian television series on the life of Leon Trotsky (*Trotsky*).

⁵ David Neiwert, *Daily Kos*, “How the ‘Cultural Marxism’ Hoax Began, and Why It’s Spreading Into the

Mainstream,” July 19, 2019, <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/1/23/1828527/-How-the-cultural-Marxism-hoax-began-and-why-it-s-spreading-into-the-mainstream>.

⁶ Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor About the Jews: Antisemitism, Conspiracy, and the Protocols of*

Zion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

In this article, I will show that the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory is antisemitic by drawing from three of the main writers who advocate for the theory in the U.S. context today. Cultural Marxism is not just a conspiracy theory about the Frankfurt School as such, but a conspiracy theory that trades on the Frankfurt School's perceived Jewishness and amplifies antisemitic tropes, including theories of Jewish conspiratorial control of education, entertainment, finance, and the media, and portrayals of a Jewish influence on culture as promoting a regression in moral and aesthetic mores. Rather than trace all the increasing uses of the term on the right, I will focus on three of the main proponents of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory: Kevin MacDonald, William S. Lind, and Paul Gottfried. The first (MacDonald) is a straightforward white nationalist; the second (Lind) would prefer to be called a "paleoconservative," but also indulges in antisemitism; and the third (Gottfried) is a fascist-leaning intellectual who is confusingly ethnically Jewish with certain antisemitic sides, and sees himself as an inheritor of Critical Theory who now must fight against it.

THREE PROPONENTS OF THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

The first time someone asked me if I was a "Cultural Marxist," I assumed they had been exposed to neo-Nazi propaganda. Some quick research, however, revealed that I was wrong to assume. In fact, they could just as well have been watching Fox News.⁷ A theory that started out in fringe political corners⁸ and eventually became popular among neo-Nazis, has also moved via a variety of channels, including "paleoconservatives" like Pat Buchanan⁹, into something bordering on mainstream discourse.

The term "Cultural Marxism" has been bandied about by Andrew Breitbart,¹⁰ founder of Turning Point USA Charlie Kirk,¹¹ young right-

⁷ Before his death, Andrew Breitbart, the founder of *Breitbart News*, which was later taken over by Steve Bannon, was the main promoter of the "cultural Marxism" conspiracy theory on Fox News. (Neiwert, "Norway Terrorist Breivik").

⁸ A recent article in *Commune Magazine* traces the first use of the term to an obscure article by a member of the Lyndon LaRouche group. (Andrew Woods, "The American Roots of a Right-Wing Conspiracy," *Commune*, March 20, 2019,

<https://communemag.com/the-american-roots-of-a-right-wing-conspiracy/>

⁹ Bill Berkowitz, "'Cultural Marxism' Catching On," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Accessed September 28, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

¹⁰ Neiwert, "Norway Terrorist Breivik."

¹¹ Charlie Kirk, "French Rioters Know the Truth About Democratic Socialism—Let's Not Bring it to America" Fox News Accessed October 7, 2019

wing pundit Ben Shapiro,¹² Washington State Representative Matt Shea,¹³ Alex Jones's media outlet *Infowars*,¹⁴ and members of Brazilian far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's administration,¹⁵ including Bolsonaro's son, who enthusiastically described Steve Bannon as an opponent of Cultural Marxism.¹⁶ A former aide to Trump, Rich Higgins, even wrote a famous memo framing Trump's presidential campaign as a war on Cultural Marxism that needed to be sustained during his presidency. Higgins wrote of a "cabal" (an antisemitic trope) promoting Cultural Marxism that included "globalists, bankers, Islamists, and conservative Republicans," and had captured control of the media, academia, politics, and the financial system, as well as controlling attempts to tamp down on hate speech and hate groups through CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) government programs. The Frankfurt School, Higgins asserted, sought to deconstruct everything in order to destroy it, giving rise to society-wide nihilism.

Bearing this cultural context in mind, we can focus on three of the most prominent proponents of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory: Kevin MacDonald, William S. Lind, and Paul Gottfried. Despite the differences between the three figures and the varying degrees to which they directly highlight the Jewish background of the Frankfurt School, one can see in each case how their account of the Frankfurt School's ideas, praxis, and influence involves distortion or exaggeration, and how each account plays upon antisemitic tropes.

<https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/charlie-kirk-french-rioters-know-the-truth-about-democratic-socialism-lets-not-bring-it-to-america>.

¹² Ben Shapiro, "Ben Shapiro: Frankfurt School" accessed October 7, 2019

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_Ngy2aU_QY

¹³ Matt Shea, "Wywiad z Mattem Shea z Waszyngtońskiej Izby Reprezentantów / The interview with Rep. Matt Shea (R)," Accessed October 7, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoC97IkaZ2Q&fbclid=IwAR1mHspwDb5iFIInulNSmhjKSuHbcK42s-l5sQRAiOsRtISdHO7VGPeP6_w.

¹⁴ Infowars, "Is Cultural Marxism America's New Mainline Ideology?" October 10, 2018, <https://www.infowars.com/is-cultural-marxism-americas-new-mainline-ideology/>.

¹⁵ Jonathan Watts, "Brazil's New Foreign Minister Believes Climate Change is a Marxist Plot," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2018,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/15/brazil-foreign-minister-ernesto-araujo-climate-change-marxist-plot>; Jon Lee Anderson, "Jair Bolsonaro's Southern Strategy,"

The New Yorker, March 25, 2019,

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/01/jair-bolsonaros-southern-strategy>.

¹⁶ Robert Mackey, "Eduardo Bolsonaro, Pro-Trump Son of Brazil's President, on Track to Be Ambassador to U.S.," *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2019/08/13/eduardo-bolsonaro-pro-trump-son-brazils-president-track-ambassador-u-s/>.

KEVIN MACDONALD

White nationalist¹⁷ Kevin MacDonald was impressed by mass shooter Anders Breivik's writings on Cultural Marxism. Breivik was, MacDonald wrote after the attacks, "a serious political thinker with a great many insights and some good practical ideas on strategy."¹⁸

MacDonald is one of the leading figures of what might be called the "intellectual alt-right," the suit-and-tie fascists who have been to college, who write books, and who gather around conferences and think tanks. A retired psychology professor and evolutionary psychologist (a field that has often come under controversy), MacDonald's gradual exile from the ranks of accepted scholarship began with a publication in a Holocaust denial journal, defending Holocaust denier David Irving, and progressed with the publication of three pseudo-scientific books defending antisemitic conspiracy theories in the 1990s.¹⁹ The theme of "Cultural Marxism" is taken up in the third book in the trilogy, *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (1998).

According to MacDonald's *Culture of Critique*, Cultural Marxism is a part of a Jewish "group evolutionary strategy." The use of the term "group evolutionary strategies" to imply that people groups could have long-term practices of cultivating and essentially "breeding" for certain traits, is not found in wider scientific literature, and MacDonald was the first to use the term in this way. In *A People That Shall Dwell Alone*, the prequel to his *The Culture of Critique*, MacDonald argues, for example, that Jews have strategically achieved higher "verbal intelligence" as measured by IQ scores,²⁰ enabling them to gain certain forms of dominance over gentiles. In *The Culture of Critique*, MacDonald explores movements that were led in large part by Jews, with MacDonald assessing them as "Jewishly motivated"²¹ and aimed at "advancing specific Jewish interests," whether these movements claimed to be doing so or not; in cases where leaders did not believe they are engaged in a uniquely Jewish project, MacDonald suggests they were engaged in "self-deception."²² Those engaged in "self-

¹⁷ "Kevin MacDonald," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed July 7, 2019,

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/kevin-macdonald>

¹⁸ Mike Wendling, *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 24.

¹⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Kevin MacDonald."

²⁰ MacDonald, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone*, 188.

²¹ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, v.

²² MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, vi.

deception,” among whom he includes the Frankfurt School, MacDonald classifies as especially pernicious: “The best deceivers are those who are self-deceived.”²³

MacDonald locates Cultural Marxism within an historical trajectory that includes the transformation (in some cases secularization) of Jewish belief and practice into a “universalist ideology.”²⁴ According to MacDonald, Jews are using appeals to inclusion, democracy, social justice, and so forth in an attempt to move white gentiles into undermining their own race, including by shaming whites into allowing mass immigration from majority non-white countries, encouraging abortion, and enforcing multiculturalism and political correctness. Cultural Marxism, MacDonald concludes, is thus a Jewish strategy for making white gentiles feel bad about themselves and for encouraging them to destroy their race and culture.²⁵

The thesis of *The Culture of Critique* is that Jews, especially leftist Jews, including members of the Frankfurt School, adopted a universalist worldview as a strategy to advance their particular, Jewish interests, and MacDonald believes that Jews are biologically suited to this task.²⁶ One might object that disproportionately high involvement by Jews in leftist social movements could be explainable in terms of a sense of solidarity between oppressed groups, or as an extension of the ethical values of Judaism, such as the injunctions of the prophets to defend the rights of the poor and the foreigner. But MacDonald sees the history of Jewish radicalism not as a product of choices by individual Jews, but as a collective project of Jews seeking power under cover of false claims of concern for universal human emancipation. The universalist tradition of Jewish radicalism—its humanism, its anti-nationalism, its commitment to a universal ethic transcending religious boundaries—is in MacDonald’s view nothing but a ruse.²⁷ By sticking together in leftist political circles while working to undermine nationalism and Christianity, MacDonald claims, Jews maintained group identity and vied for power over gentiles.²⁸ This belief combines the antisemitic tropes of Jewish “clannishness” and Jewish conspiratorial secret power. MacDonald also falls back on his theories about Ashkenazi Jewish high IQs to explain how this conspiratorial power could be possible.

²³ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 10.

²⁴ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 89.

²⁵ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, xxiii, xxviii.

²⁶ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, xxxii.

²⁷ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 89.

²⁸ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 89.

In the narrative that MacDonald has set up—Jews are either openly concerned only with their own interests, or they are lying/self-deceptive “universalists” whose concern for humanity is simply a manipulation for in-group gain—there is no way that the Frankfurt School can win. When Adorno embraces the “negative” as a preferable concept to the universal, MacDonald decides Adorno is a particularist committed to a special role for Jews in negating established institutions. When Erich Fromm defends the value of the individual from the crushing power of capitalist alienation, MacDonald assumes Fromm is being “hypocritical,” since Fromm still seems to have some feelings of identification with Judaism, which is a group and not an individual identity.²⁹ MacDonald also frequently compares an individual Jewish thinker’s beliefs to the set of beliefs MacDonald ascribes to Jews as a whole, and then decides that the thinker’s work is internally contradictory. In MacDonald’s world, all Jews agree with each other, at least on an unconscious level. (So much for the famous saying, “Two Jews, three opinions,” which so well encapsulates the Jewish tradition of debate and diversity of opinion.)

To be clear, *The Culture of Critique* is an exercise in circular reasoning and propaganda, not serious scholarship. Its attempts at “science” are laughable at best; for example, MacDonald tells us that “North German” infants are friendlier to strangers than “Israeli” ones, because a study found that Israeli infants cried more in the presence of researchers, and he takes this as evidence that Jews are less friendly to outsiders and more clannish than non-Jewish whites. MacDonald also routinely takes quotes out of context and reinterprets them, especially when he thinks he can catch a Jewish leftist saying something peculiar about hatred, jealousy, or the like. (For example, he takes a passage in which Walter Benjamin was clearly complaining about the German Social Democrats, and implies bizarrely that Benjamin was describing a desire to bring down gentile society through mass immigration.³⁰) At least it takes MacDonald until page 162 to unironically cite Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* as a source for his claim that Jews hypocritically profess universalism but practice particularism.

²⁹ MacDonald writes: “The irony (hypocrisy?) is that Fromm and the other members of the Frankfurt School, as individuals who strongly identified with a highly collectivist group (Judaism), advocated radical individualism for the society as a whole” (MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 141).

³⁰ MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, x. (MacDonald is quoting from Thesis XII in Benjamin’s theses on the philosophy of history (Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, Accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>).)

WILLIAM S. LIND

Another major purveyor of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory is “paleo-conservative” William S. Lind. Unlike MacDonald, Lind does not focus his critique of Cultural Marxism explicitly on “the Jews,” but his theory does have antisemitic dimensions. In fact, in 2002, Lind spoke to a Holocaust denial conference organized by Willis Carto, and in his talk on the Frankfurt School, Lind pointed out, “These guys were all Jewish.”³¹ Instead of “the Jews,” however, Lind’s professed antagonist is the “globalists,” a term that conflates capitalists (supporters of capitalist “globalization”) with socialists and communists (supporters of a “global” working class revolt *against* capitalist globalization). Attacks on “globalists” (as well as “cosmopolitans,” or to use an earlier term, “internationalists”) are often used to make antisemitism more palatable for a wider audience. Antisemitism has long leaned on an equation of Jews with both capitalists and communists; a frequent element of antisemitic belief has been the portrayal of the Jew as both “banker and Bolshevik.” (This two-sided nature of antisemitism also helps to explain some of the frenzied agitation against George Soros, the liberal capitalist and philanthropist; in Soros, antisemites have hit upon an ideological jackpot posterchild for their purposes: an influential left-leaning capitalist Jew, whose leftism and influence they exaggerate.³²) By presenting Jews as secretly both capitalists *and* communists, antisemitism harnesses legitimate working-class anger against capitalism (including a corrupt and exploitative financial system) and redirects that anger towards the left and scapegoated groups, including Jews. Although antisemitism pre-dates capitalism, the tendency of modern antisemitism to cast Jews as both capitalists and communists has made it possible for fascist movements to present themselves deceptively as “workers” movements (think National Socialist “Workers” Party) while still being fiercely oppositional towards the left.

William S. Lind worked closely with Paul Weyrich, who died in 2008, and both promoted the Cultural Marxism theory. Unlike Kevin

³¹ Stephen Piggott, “White nationalists Gather in Baltimore for the Ninth Annual H.L. Mencken Conference,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.splccenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/04/white-nationalists-gather-baltimore-ninth-annual-hl-mencken-club-conference>.

³² Ben Lorber, “The Resurgence of Right-Wing Anti-Semitic Conspiracism Endangers All Justice Movements,” *Rewire*, May 1, 2019, <https://rewire.news/religion-dispatches/2019/05/01/the-resurgence-of-right-wing-anti-semitic-conspiracism-endangers-all-justice-movements/>.

MacDonald, Weyrich is a major power broker on the right, who strategically used school integration fights in the South to make the white evangelical vote a formidable force, leading to the election of Reagan and eventually Trump; he helped to found a number of powerful think tanks, including the Heritage Foundation, ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority.³³ (Weyrich and Lind collaborated through another of Weyrich's think tanks, the Free Congress Foundation.) During Trump's campaign, Lind met with Trump and gifted him a copy of Weyrich and Lind's co-authored book *The Next Conservatism*.³⁴ The book is a "paleoconservative" political program, emphasizing cultural conservatism alongside foreign policy isolationism and economic nationalism, including exclusion of migrants. They suggest making English the national language and banning immigration from certain countries, especially Muslim ones.

In their book, Weyrich and Lind define the "ideology" of "Cultural Marxism" as the belief that "Western culture oppresses everyone except white males."³⁵ Cultural Marxism "now controls almost every aspect of our society: the entertainment industry (the most powerful cultural force in America), music, fine arts, the media, the universities, the public schools, even many churches." "Commonly known as 'Political Correctness' or 'multiculturalism,'"³⁶ its object is "the destruction of Western culture and the Christian religion,"³⁷ they write. Falsely crediting Georg Lukacs (another Jewish Marxist) with founding the Frankfurt School, Weyrich and Lind emphasize that Lukacs established a sex education program in Hungarian schools: "He knew that if he could destroy the West's traditional sexual morals, he would have taken a giant step toward destroying Western culture itself."³⁸ They also blame Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcuse for creating "political correctness."³⁹

³³ AJ+, "The Man Who Mobilized the Evangelical Vote," April 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcC53j32BW4>; Brendan Fischer, "Paul Weyrich's Troika Reunited: ALEC Partners with Republican Study Committee at Heritage Foundation," *PR Watch*, September 12, 2012, <https://www.prwatch.org/news/2012/09/11752/paul-weyrichs-troika-reunited-alec-partners-republican-study-committee-heritage-f>.

³⁴ Bruce E. Wilson, "Donald Trump Meets William S. Lind," *4th Gen War*, July 3, 2016, <https://4thgenwar.wordpress.com/2016/07/03/trump-meets-man-who-inspired-2011-terror-attack-deadlier-than-orlando-shooting/>.

³⁵ Weyrich and Lind, 15.

³⁶ Weyrich and Lind, 36.

³⁷ Weyrich and Lind, 34.

³⁸ Weyrich and Lind, 37.

³⁹ Weyrich and Lind, 37.

Weyrich and Lind see the Frankfurt School as essentially stabbing America in the back, harkening back to Nazi portrayals of the Jews as unpatriotic backstabbers in World War I: "Fatefully for America, when Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, the Frankfurt School fled—and reestablished itself in New York City with help from Columbia University. There, it shifted its focus from destroying Western culture in Germany to destroying it in the United States, the country that had given it refuge."⁴⁰ Unable to distinguish a critique of right-wing and status quo institutions from an attempt to destroy all things, Weyrich and Lind view Critical Theory as an intentionally destructive criticism of all of Western tradition. What, they ask, is the "theory" of Critical Theory? "The theory is to criticize, subjecting every traditional institution, starting with the family, to brutal and unrelenting criticism in order to bring them down,"⁴¹ they write.

Like MacDonald, Weyrich and Lind appear to be personally offended by the Frankfurt School's critique of fascists, as seen in their statement: "Its series of publications called 'studies in prejudice,' which culminated in Theodor Adorno's immensely influential book *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950...said that anyone who believes and lives by traditional Western culture is evil, a 'racist' or 'sexist' or 'fascist'—and is also mentally ill."⁴² They then proceed to argue that the Frankfurt School defended and spread its ideas through a sophisticated, society-wide type of brainwashing:

The question facing the members of the Frankfurt School was, how could they couple their culturally destructive philosophy with a weapon powerful enough to actually destroy Western culture? They knew philosophy alone was too weak. Fatefully, they hit on a brilliant answer. Crossing Marx with Freud, they took from psychology a tool known as 'psychological conditioning.' By endless repetition, psychological conditioning works ideas directly into the unconscious, without any need for rational argument. The Frankfurt School worked psychological conditioning that transmitted their Cultural Marxism into education theory, into the mass media and into the entertainment industry (Horkheimer and Adorno spent the war years in Hollywood).⁴³

⁴⁰ Weyrich and Lind, 37.

⁴¹ Weyrich and Lind, 38.

⁴² Weyrich and Lind, 38.

⁴³ Weyrich and Lind, 38.

The book's claim that the Frankfurt School hit upon a method of psychological conditioning for spreading its ideas is among the most absurd inaccuracies, relying on an insinuation based on Horkheimer and Adorno having lived in Los Angeles. This is where the latent antisemitism of the theory becomes particularly clear: according to Weyrich and Lind, who offer no evidence for this claim, a group of Jewish intellectuals were sneaking around Hollywood looking for ways to subliminally beam their ideas into the heads of Americans.

In a short article for *The American Conservative* in 2018, "The Scourge of Cultural Marxism," Lind repeats many of the claims made in *The Next Conservatism*. He claims that Cultural Marxism "seeks to disguise its real nature and goals, which are the destruction of Western culture and the Christian religion."⁴⁴ Adorno's philosophy of art is blamed for an aesthetic decline in contemporary society, while Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* has "wrecked America's public schools." Cultural Marxism, and especially Herbert Marcuse, are blamed for the 1960s sexual liberation movement, and Marcuse is credited with introducing the idea that the revolution will be made by "victim groups" rather than the proletariat. Marcuse's critique of tolerance is attacked, and he is quoted out of context as advocating "tolerance for all ideas and movements coming from the left, and intolerance for all ideas and movements coming from the right." (In a later section, I will clarify Marcuse's views on tolerance.)

Lind concludes of Cultural Marxism: "It is propagated by much of the video screen media. Cultural Marxism relies for its power not on logical argument but on psychological conditioning, to which video screens lend themselves all too well." And here we come again to the point: instead of simply being a group of scholars with whom he disagrees, the Frankfurt School are a shadowy cabal manipulating his mind through secret conditioning and "video screens." What mythic power he projects onto a small group of intellectual exiles!

It might all seem comical if it were not for the power and influence of people like Lind, as well as their aspirations for violence. To truly understand Lind's danger, one must look to his novel *Victoria: A Novel of 4th Generation Warfare*, in which he fantasizes about a coming race war led by Christian militias, and describes tactics of "fourth generation warfare" that are similar to those of neo-Nazis' "leaderless resistance" or Timothy McVeigh's terrorism. In "fourth generation warfare," tactics are not shared in common across a movement or military, but rather

⁴⁴ William S. Lind, "The Scourge of Cultural Marxism," *The American Conservative*, May/June 2018, 12.

individuals or small groups implement whatever means they deem most effective for the movement's shared ends. In one scene in the novel, the entire faculty of Dartmouth University are massacred in retaliation for their promotion of Cultural Marxism.

PAUL GOTTFRIED

The massacre of the Dartmouth faculty is Paul Gottfried's "favorite scene" in Lind's *Victoria*.⁴⁵ It takes a little time to understand Paul Gottfried's standpoint and its far-right nature—at times, he can be mistaken for a Critical Theorist himself, as he likes to note that he studied under Herbert Marcuse (although, at the time, he was already a conservative and disagreed with him), and Gottfried has played a role in far-right journal *Telos*, which initially began as a left-wing Critical Theory journal. Furthermore, Gottfried is ethnically Jewish, although he seems to carry some of the prejudices shared by his fellow promoters of the Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory. The same Gottfried takes credit for creating the term "alt-right" and was a mentor to Richard Spencer (the white nationalist now famous for sieg heiling Trump and later being punched in the head at the presidential inauguration), although Spencer's white nationalist politics are more extreme than Gottfried's "paleoconservatism."⁴⁶

Gottfried's intellectual heroes include Friedrich Nietzsche⁴⁷ and Carl Schmitt, and like them, he is critical of the values of democracy and equality. A self-titled "reactionary," like Lind he calls himself a "paleoconservative," a term Gottfried also coined.⁴⁸ In his book *The Conservative Movement*, Gottfried writes that paleoconservatives "raise issues that the neoconservatives and the Left would both seek to keep closed," such as "questions about the desirability of political and social equality, the functionality of human rights thinking, and the genetic basis of intelligence."⁴⁹

Gottfried has been a friend of Pat Buchanan since the 1980s and played

⁴⁵ Paul Gottfried, "William S. Lind's VICTORIA Heralds America Breakup," VDARE, <https://vdare.com/articles/william-lind-s-victoria-heralds-coming-america-breakup>

⁴⁶ Gottfried even warmly thanks Spencer as a sounding board, in the Acknowledgments in Gottfried's 2009 memoir, calling Spencer "a true Southern patrician" and "[maybe] among the last of his kind" (Gottfried, *Encounters*, 206).

⁴⁷ "Session: Remembering the Interwar Right," Mises Institute, Accessed July 5, 2019, <https://mises.org/library/session-remembering-interwar-right>.

⁴⁸ Jacob Siegel, "The Alt-Right's Jewish Godfather," *Tablet*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/218712/spencer-gottfried-alt-right>.

⁴⁹ Paul Gottfried, *The Conservative Movement*, 155; cited in Jacob Siegel.

a role in Buchanan's 1992 presidential campaign.⁵⁰ He was later involved with the paleoconservative publication *Taki's Magazine* alongside Richard Spencer, and Gottfried was influential on Spencer. Gottfried's writings appear on the antisemitic, Holocaust-denying website of Ron Unz, *The Unz Review*.⁵¹ Gottfried's group,⁵² the H.L. Mencken Club, hosted William S. Lind as a speaker in 2016 and has hosted a number of white nationalist speakers at its conferences.⁵³

To really understand Paul Gottfried's mission, however, one must look at his role in *Telos* magazine since the late 1980s. *Telos* shifted from a left-wing to a right-wing journal around the time Gottfried joined the editorial staff, as other staff were quitting in protest of editor Paul Piccone's support of the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and "an atmosphere [at the journal] that is not only sexist but demeaning to all human beings."⁵⁴ Crucial to the transition was *Telos's* increasing engagement with the work of Nazi legal philosopher Carl Schmitt. *Telos* was also a major translator of French New Right (fascist) writer Alain de Benoist,⁵⁵ and two recent *Telos* articles are friendly to the ideas of Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin. The critique of the totally administered society described by such Frankfurt School thinkers as Marcuse was to be solved not through progressive social change but through a leader/Führer/decider who could stand above and beyond the strictures of the law, in a triumph of arbitrary power over the monotony and loneliness of modern bureaucracy.

Central white nationalist figure Sam Francis was also associated with *Telos*, including serving as the keynote speaker in 1994 at a *Telos* conference on populism.⁵⁶ Francis was also an advisor to Pat Buchanan,⁵⁷ belonged to the white supremacist League of the South, and was "a close

⁵⁰ Paul Gottfried, *Encounters: My Life with Nixon, Marcuse, and Other Friends and Teachers* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), 131; Jacob Siegel.

⁵¹ Unz is also ethnically Jewish but deeply entangled in a web of conspiracy theories. Unz's support for Palestinians against Israelis wins him an eclectic base of support, including some who identify themselves with the left. However, Unz was also part of a "Human Biodiversity" group studying race and IQ, etc.

⁵² Piggott, "White Nationalists Gather."

⁵³ The Mencken Club, "The Ninth Annual H.L. Mencken Club Conference," Accessed October 10, 2019, <http://hlmenckenclub.org/2016-conference>.

⁵⁴ Danny Postel, "The Metamorphosis of *Telos*," *In These Times*, April 21-30, 1991.

⁵⁵ Joseph Lowndes, "From New Class Critique to White Nationalism: *Telos*, the Alt-Right, and the

Origins of Trumpism," *Konturen* 9, (2017),

<http://journals.oregondigital.org/index.php/konturen/article/view/3977/3755>Lowndes, "From New Class Critique."

⁵⁶ Lowndes, "From New Class Critique to White Nationalism."

⁵⁷ Lowndes, "From New Class Critique to White Nationalism."

reader of...*Telos*." Francis was also the editor of the *Citizens Informer*, the publication of the white nationalist Council of Conservative Citizens.⁵⁸ The National Policy Institute was founded shortly before Francis's death in 2005 to focus on Francis's work, although Richard Spencer soon took over as head of the NPI.⁵⁹

Paul Gottfried says "Cultural Marxism...aims at the utter destruction of bourgeois Christian society...with the moral, cultural, and religious foundations of Western civilization, all of which are implicated in fascism, the oppression of women, antisemitism, homophobia, all the things we are supposed to condemn."⁶⁰ Gottfried distinguishes Cultural Marxism from the philosophy of Marx, painting a picture of the Frankfurt School as abandoning Marxist political economy (a point he exaggerates, as this does not apply to all members) and being mainly interested in projects of progressive, liberal inclusion that he often accompanies with scare quotes (e.g., "I couldn't imagine even the founders of the Frankfurt School going quite so far in their embrace of 'gay rights' as to welcome what we now hail as part of a new political consensus") or a tone of irony, but to which his objections are not always clear.⁶¹ Although he does not always make his objections completely clear, Gottfried's objection to the Frankfurt School seems to be tied to his "reactionary" defense of tradition. Although he identifies as a paleoconservative as opposed to a fascist, he did write a book that defends certain types of fascism (*Fascism: Career of a Concept*) while attempting to distinguish himself from Nazism. Despite his own Jewish background, Gottfried also seems to harbor some selective prejudice against Jews, particularly eastern European Jews, who seem to encompass for him his concerns with both Jewish neoconservatives and Jewish leftists,⁶² and he has surrounded himself with white nationalists and antisemites of various sorts.

A distinguishing mark of paranoid and ideological (that is, false) conspiracy theories is their persistent refusal to make distinctions. Right-wingers of the paranoid sort can thus easily be amazed, for example, that some leftists advocate for gun ownership restrictions, while others join

⁵⁸ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Sam Francis," <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/sam-francis>

⁵⁹ Shane Burley, *Fascism Today: What It Is and How to End It* (Oakland: AK Press, 2017), 61-2.

⁶⁰ "Cultural Marxism vs. Postmodernism: Paul Gottfried Disagrees with Jordan Peterson," accessed July 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C38C7isqrw>.

⁶¹ Paul Gottfried, "The Frankfurt School and Cultural Marxism," https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/01/the_frankfurt_school_and_cultural_marxism.html

⁶² Jacob Siegel; Gottfried, "The Influence of the Jewish Lobby."

organizations like the Socialist Rifle Association, which advocate against such restrictions—"That just shows their 'real' plan is to take guns away from conservatives, but keep them for themselves," they conclude. In fact, of course, there are simply differences of opinion about guns on the left, as there are on many topics.

The Cultural Marxism conspiracy theorists are no exception to this lack of distinction-making. First, the ideas advanced by any individual member of the Frankfurt School are generally taken as representative of all members of the Institute; Marcuse's views on tolerance, Adorno's aesthetics, or Fromm's psychoanalytic analysis of fascism cannot be universally attributed to "Critical Theory" as a whole. Secondly, the lack of distinctions made often extends beyond the Frankfurt School, such that everyone promoting "political correctness," for example, or "multiculturalism," is considered part of a single school of thought originating with the Frankfurt School. In MacDonald's case, the lack of distinctions extends so far as to encompass all Jews.

The linkages made between the Frankfurt School and other institutions and schools of thought are generally tenuous at best. Critical Theory differs in its approach from postmodernism, which unlike Critical Theory has tended to be wary of or even hostile towards Marxism, notwithstanding exceptions such as postmodernist Jacques Derrida's homage to Marx's continued haunting of the present in his book *Specters of Marx*. Critical Theory has tended to be quite male and Eurocentric, open to reason and to science, and often fond of the sort of "grand narratives" postmodernism rejects. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said (not a postmodernist), most famous for his critique of "orientalism" ("Western" stereotypes of "the Orient"), was critical of the Frankfurt School's false "universalism," and its tendency to view everything through a European lens. Some Critical Theorists have wrestled with such critiques as Said's and seek to "decolonize" Critical Theory.⁶³ Additionally, some Frankfurt School theorists of Horkheimer's generation engaged with non-Western traditions (such as Erich Fromm's work on Zen Buddhism). However, the Frankfurt School of Horkheimer's generation were essentially German philosophers, at home in the world of Kant, Hegel, and Marx. The image of these thinkers held by antisemitic conspiracy theorists—i.e., Critical Theorists meeting in some secret room plotting to destroy people's appreciation for Shakespeare or Gothic cathedrals—is deeply laughable. Although elements of the Frankfurt School were critical of Western

⁶³ See for example, Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

culture and civilization—Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and much of Adorno’s and Benjamin’s work in particular, contain poignant critiques of the Enlightenment—this is by no means representative of the whole of the Frankfurt School’s project, nor even of the totality of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s contributions. And the notion that the Frankfurt School is against “the West” or “Christianity” *tout court* is hopelessly simplistic and false. Nor is “political correctness”—taken here to mean concern about avoiding certain kinds of speech that can cause harm to members of particular groups—a major theme in the Frankfurt School’s work. Nor was the Frankfurt School even unanimous in its support for the New Left; infamously, a frustrated Adorno even called the cops on some leftist student protesters for disrupting his teaching.

Herbert Marcuse’s essay on “repressive tolerance” is often cited as the source for the claim that Cultural Marxism is engaged in a “political correctness” project, and the essay is often misunderstood as an argument for state censorship or for social shaming of dissenters. In fact, the essay attempts to show that while United States society claims to be a beacon of freedom due to its practice of tolerance and absence of censorship, the U.S. capitalist state uses this very tolerance as a tool to reinforce its hegemony and to disempower the very kinds of brave, dissenting ideas that the liberal ideal of tolerance was originally intended to empower. The solution for Marcuse is not to make the U.S. state more repressive and censorious, but rather to refuse to obey the commands of a state that accommodates routine dissent (letters to the editor, calls to Congress) as so many examples of its own legitimacy, while that same state simultaneously casually rejects the protestations of the dissenters in order to carry out racist and classist projects at home and imperial violence abroad. Since dissenters have no ability to make their ideas stick under the current system, the U.S.’s claim to be a beacon of freedom is essentially a sham. Like Erich Fromm, by the 1960s Marcuse was plenty public about his radical politics. He was challenging his society directly and calling for revolutionary transformation...no underhanded beaming into people’s minds via Lind’s “video screen media” is going on here.

Despite such radicalism, however, it is also important to note that, contrary to William Lind’s claim that Critical Theory aims to “criticize everything” with the intent of destroying it, the word “critical” in “critical theory” refers to a critique of injustice and of ideology.⁶⁴ The term “critical” here also alludes to the Frankfurt School’s necessary attempt to

⁶⁴ For example, ideology in the generic Marxist sense of the term: not worldviews in general, but false belief systems that conceal contradictory or unpleasant realities that could stir legitimate criticisms of the status quo

formulate a philosophy in light of their post-Kantian context. “Critique” was a central term for the great eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, famed for his trilogy of “critiques,” *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and *The Critique of Judgment*, which together contributed groundbreaking philosophical shifts in epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Any serious German philosopher of the early Frankfurt School’s generation would have been situating their work in relation to Kant and the neo-Kantian schools of the time. To be clear, Critical Theory is unquestionably *radical* in intent, in the sense of seeking to go “to the root” of social problems and to transform society, but this radicalism cannot be reduced to a nihilistic impulse to destroy with abandon. The philosophical trajectory out of which the Frankfurt School largely emerges—beginning at least as early as Immanuel Kant, J.G. Fichte, and G.W.F. Hegel, on through Karl Marx to later Marxist theorists including Georg Lukacs—emphasized the inherent practicality of theory; Kant even wrote an essay titled, “On the Common Saying: ‘That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice.’” (He was against the saying.) Marx had written, as the Frankfurt School thinkers surely knew, that theory “becomes a material force” when it “grips the masses.”⁶⁵ For theory to be “critical,” then, implies that in order for theory to be “practical” (as true theory is), it must aim at undoing social injustices through challenging the worldviews that support them; theory must change, not merely interpret, the world (to paraphrase Marx). But to hear the conspiracy theorists tell it, Critical Theorists want to deny the working class access to culture and religion (specifically Christianity)—in reality, Critical Theory does challenge capitalism and intertwined unjust social structures such as the patriarchal family, but as a project, Critical Theory aims to liberate humanity, not destroy with abandon.

THE “FUNCTION” OF CULTURAL MARXISM

The theory of Cultural Marxism fills a wide variety of functions. It condemns leftists and liberals, lumping them into a single category, while also explaining how even moderate conservatives feel the need to show levels of courtesy and accommodation to opponents that the far-right finds inappropriate.

For antisemites, the theory fulfills a host of functions. Because of the Frankfurt School’s interest in Freud and its critique of authoritarian family

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, Accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

structures, defenders of the Cultural Marxism theory are able to continue the Nazi tradition of condemning psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science” and painting Jews as promiscuous and lecherous. Relatedly, Cultural Marxists are sometimes accused of “sexualizing children” (in the form of wanting to provide sex education classes in schools or accepting transgender identities among children, for example). These claims about sexualizing children make the Cultural Marxism theory mesh troublingly well with the far-right conspiracy theory of “Qanon,” which also has antisemitic sides, and which claims that Donald Trump’s presidency is actually part of an elaborate plan to crush a secret “cabal” of pedophile elites involved in ritual child abuse activities. Descriptions of these elites’ supposed activities often mirror the traditional “blood libel” accusations against Jews that go back centuries.

As with many antisemitic conspiracy theories, Cultural Marxism portrays the Jews as wily, behind-the-scenes controllers. Cultural Marxism updates the “Judeo-Bolshevism”⁶⁶ conspiracy theory for a post-Cold War context. It is less compelling to cast Jews as the behind-the-scenes controllers of the global Communist empire, and so Jews become shadowy behind-the-scenes controllers of the entire culture of the West. However, the outcomes as imagined by antisemites are the same: Jews as disloyal to their nations, as promoting “degenerate” art (hence the particular interest in the Frankfurt School’s aesthetics), as undermining sexual morality, and so forth.

For social conservatives who may not be antisemitic (or at least not consciously), Cultural Marxism provides an explanation for how an overwhelming number of people, perhaps the majority, disagree with them on what they take to be fundamental truths. Just as many white supremacists in the United States blamed the Jews for the civil rights movement because they believed African Americans were too stupid to achieve their own victories without shadowy controllers behind the scenes,⁶⁷ cultural conservatives are able to save face by blaming “Cultural Marxists” for the fact that so few people agree with them. Unable to defend their own ideas in the public sphere in a convincing manner, they rely on

⁶⁶ Paul Hanebrink’s new book offers an extensive history of the Judeo-Bolshevism theory, including addressing its use by Hitler and Romanian fascist Corneliu Codreanu. (Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2018).

⁶⁷ Eric Ward, “Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism,” June 29, 2017, *Political Research Associates*, <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>.

the assumption that their opponents are brainwashed by powerful elites, rather than having been rationally convinced.

WHY FASCISTS SHOULD FEAR THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL⁶⁸

In addition to the functions that the Cultural Marxism narrative serves for antisemites and the far-right, they are likely to resist the Frankfurt School's influence because they understand, at least on an unconscious level, that the Frankfurt School does provide intellectual resources and an intellectual tradition capable of adequately challenging their ideas. The Frankfurt School contributed a great deal of theoretical work in opposing fascism and antisemitism. Among the most important texts are Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, which critiqued the dialectic whereby positivism fed into fascism; Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, studying a variety of authoritarian impulses both in Nazi Germany and contemporary U.S. society; Adorno's takedown of Martin Heidegger (a thinker now defended by *Telos* magazine) as an obscurantist Nazi in *The Jargon of Authenticity* and Adorno's classic *The Authoritarian Personality*; Leo Lowenthal's study of the rhetorical techniques of the antisemitic "agitator" in *Prophets of Deceit*; and Franz Neumann's critique of Nazi society and culture in *Behemoth*.

Furthermore, not lost on fascists is the Frankfurt School's involvement in taking on the Nazis through government institutions and NGOs. During the war, Lowenthal, Marcuse, Kirchheimer, Neumann, and Pollock all worked for the U.S. government.⁶⁹ Neumann, Marcuse, and Kirchheimer worked specifically for the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, on the war effort.⁷⁰ "After the defeat of the Nazis, Neumann continued to work for the OSS and the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal under its chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson."⁷¹ Following the war, Marcuse and Neumann helped to develop denazification plans for Germany, and many members of the Institute conducted research on antisemitism in U.S. society through grants from the American Jewish Committee.

I suspect that such critics as Kevin MacDonald sense that the Frankfurt School's intensely interdisciplinary work on fascism, especially its

⁶⁸ Or just stop being fascists, which would be much preferable.

⁶⁹ Stuart Jeffries, *The Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*. (New York: Verso, 2016), 253.

⁷⁰ Jeffries, 253.

⁷¹ Jeffries, 256.

engagement with psychoanalysis, gave them insight into the unconscious motivations of fascists and antisemites. Frankfurt School theorists would have no difficulty, for example, in spotting the psychological projection involved in MacDonald's claims that Jews are authoritarian, sexist and patriarchal, xenophobic, seek out charismatic leaders, reject reason and science, and think morality is not universal but rather based on ethnic belonging.⁷² I believe, in fact, that the Frankfurt School remains useful to struggles against fascism not only negatively, as a critique of fascism, but positively, as a rich source of theoretical and thus ultimately practical insight into how fascism can be defeated. However, for the purposes of this article, it suffices to say: fascists should probably fear the Frankfurt School, but not for the reasons they claim.

As for the rest of us, Cultural Marxism turns out to be a useful exercise in understanding contemporary iterations of antisemitism, but provides no useful analysis or critique of the Frankfurt School. As seen in the uptake of the concept of Cultural Marxism by MacDonald, Lind, and Gottfried, Cultural Marxism is a conspiracy theory that links a small group of leftist German Jewish intellectuals to an implausible exercise in global control of culture, from a takeover of all school curriculum to the control of public discourse, sexual morality, entertainment, the economy, and social and political movements. The conspiracy theory not only misrepresents the Frankfurt School's intellectual project—it also perpetuates centuries-old stereotypes that dehumanize Jews, seeing a controlling hive-mind in the place of individual persons. For those already predisposed to antisemitism, Cultural Marxism provides a facile defense of the view that, with the Soviet Union now long gone, a nefarious “Judeo-Bolshevism” secretly holds the reins of global power. Proponents of this theory, whether they quietly write books or livestream themselves conducting mass shootings, are perpetuating untruths that make the world more dangerous and less humane.

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⁷² MacDonald, xxxi.

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Critical Theory and the Critique of Antisemitism: On Society as Economic Object

Werner Bonefeld¹

The paper argues that the critique of modern antisemitism is fundamentally a critique of capitalist political economy. It expounds the critical tradition associated with the work of Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno and Postone, to argue that antisemitism is innate to the existent society. It explores antisemitism as a perverted form of anti-capitalism, one which associates labour economy with freedom, *Arbeit macht frei*, and rejects the manifestation of labour economy in the form of money as more money. It specifies antisemitism as a personalised critique of a crisis-ridden dynamic of real economic abstractions, of price and profit, and their regulation by the invisible hand. Modern antisemitism identifies the ghostlike character of the economic object, what Marx called the capital fetish, with the character and the power of the Jew. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS: Antisemitism, Money, Fetishism, Economic Object, Personalisation, Nationalism, (perverted) Anti-capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social theory reckons that the existing society contains within itself the ‘promise of freedom’ (Honneth 2010: 10). This would suggest that it also contains within itself the ‘promise’ of a freedom from

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the elements of antisemitism. Honneth's view implies that the elements of antisemitism do not really belong to society. Rather, they manifest a social pathology, which its further progress will do away with.² It is true, society ought to be free from the elements of antisemitism. Who would object to that? Yet, what really does this mean? By suggesting that antisemitism is a pathology of freedom, he does not tell us why that might be so. The critical question, why does this society express itself in antisemitic forms, is not raised. What is not raised is not recognized.

In distinction, in the critical tradition associated with the work of Karl Marx, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Moishe Postone, the elements of antisemitism are innate to the existent society (Fischer 2018). What is innate to society holds sway in its concept. In this tradition the critique of antisemitism amounts to a critique of capitalist society. Instead of holding within itself the promise of (a) freedom (from antisemitism), it holds within itself the elements of antisemitism. This literature can call upon two distinct classical texts. One is Horkheimer's and Adorno's (1979) 'Elements of Anti-Semitism', which appeared in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, the other is Postone's (1986) 'Anti-Semitism and National Socialism'. The 'Elements of Anti-Semitism' conceive of the 'rumor about Jews' (Adorno 1974: 141) as a form of paranoid rage against domination that is directly useful for the perpetuation of domination itself. It is hatred of difference, of that which is not the same and which is therefore secretly longed for but remains repressed for the sake of self-preservation within domination.³ According to Eva-Maria Ziege (2009: 8), the central hypothesis of their work in the early 1940s was that although antisemitism belongs to society, society can only be understood through antisemitism. Postone approached antisemitism as a fetishized anti-capitalism, one which imagines a conflict between concrete nature (things for use, use values) and unnatural abstractness (money and the invisible

² Honneth reformulates Kant's imperative of reason that is charged with leading humanity out of its self-imposed immaturity to maturity, by which he understands a society founded on reason. Honneth's notion that society contains within itself the promise of freedom's progress, judges its current state of affairs as a pathology – a 'pathology of individual freedom'. That is, the promise of freedom is in fact its own premise.

³ On the 'Elements of Anti-Semitism', see Stoetzler's (2018a) insightful account. Stögner's (2014) account employs the prepositions of critical theory without expounding its critical acumen. She conceives of antisemitism as comparable to sexism in that it amounts to a 'critique' of perceived weakness by a cold-masculine society. There is much to be said about her approach to social 'coldness', but without further conceptualization of the social relations, its meaning remains opaque. See however Achinger's (2013) excellent account.

power of the market).⁴ While the ‘Elements’ developed a critical social theory of antisemitism focusing on domination, Postone’s approach expounded critical insights of Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism for a critique of modern antisemitism.⁵

The account assembled here does not argue for one or the other critical theory approach to antisemitism. I hold that political economy is the formula of an inverted social world (2016a). Society in the inverted form of the economic object is bewitched (Bonefeld, 2016b). I argue that antisemitism is the ‘rumor about Jews’ (Adorno) as the intangible puppet master of the capitalist wealth that makes itself manifest in the form of money as more money. Antisemitism amounts to a personalized critique of a crisis-ridden dynamic of real economic abstractions, of price and profit, and their regulation by the invisible hand of the market. Modern antisemitism identifies the ghostlike character of the economic object, what Marx called the capital fetish, with the character and the power of the Jew. The argument makes use of the classic texts but refrains from excessive referencing.⁶

The paper is in three sections. It starts with an account of critical theory as a critique of the ghostlike character of capitalist society. This character was already identified by Adam Smith (1981) who posited that it is

⁴ Postone (2006) applied the notion of fetishized anti-capitalism to contemporary forms of anti-imperialism, which exonerate even the most reactionary movements, including, for example, Hamas and The Hezbollah (Butler 2013). In the UK, Butler’s view defines the approach to internationalism by the Corbyn wing of the Labor Party (Bolton and Pitts 2018). On this topic, see also Bonefeld (2005, 2014b). For a critical theory account of anti-imperialism, see Stoeztler (2018b).

⁵ Postone’s *magnum opus*, *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (1993), does not consider antisemitism, which seems odd given that he considers antisemitism to be a fetishized anti-capitalism. Like the *Neue Marx Lektüre* that developed in West-Germany post-1968, his book is an attempt at re-interpreting Marx’s critique of political economy as a critique of Marxian economics. However, and as I have argued elsewhere (Bonefeld 2004) his reinterpretation expunges the political in political economy, which leads his account towards a system theory of social action. The one contributor to the *Neue Marx Lektüre* who examines antisemitism in the context of *Capital* is Michael Heinrich (2012). He presents Marx’s critique as a critique of the capitalist social relations and, in this context, expounds the critical meaning of Marx’s point about the capitalist individuals as personifications of economic categories. Antisemitism has to do with the personalization of capitalist social reality. For an appreciation of Postone’s critical theory, see Lange (2018) and O’Kane (2018). On the *Neue Marx Lektüre*, see Bonefeld (2014a).

⁶ Readers familiar with these texts will spot the references and paraphrases. Those who are not might hopefully find themselves compelled to study them. Since Bonefeld (1997) my own work builds on the intersection between critical theory of antisemitism and critical theory of capitalism, developing critical theory as a critique of economic objectivity.

regulated by an invisible hand. There then follows a section about the elements of antisemitism, which, I argue, are innate to a spellbound critique of capitalist society. The final section explores the meaning of the inscription at the gate of Auschwitz, *Arbeit macht frei*, as a most logical declaration of the elements of antisemitism made manifest.

SOCIETY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

For a critical theory of society, it is not the independence of the economic categories of cash and coin, money and profit, that require explanation. Rather, what needs to be explained are the social relations of production, which manifest themselves as a relationship between reified economic things. At its best, a critical theory of society thinks against the spell of the dazzling economic forms. It wants to get behind their fateful appearance as forces of economic nature. It therefore does not think about (reified) economic things. Rather, it thinks *in and through* them, at least that is its critical intension (see Adorno 1990: 25, 149). Thinking by means of definitions or identifications is quite able to say what some-thing comes under, what it illustrates, exemplifies or represents. It does not, however, say what some-thing is. Thought is required to grasp reality, which in its immediacy does not tell us what it is. What, for example, really is money and what holds sway in its concept? ‘Concepts’, Adorno says, ‘are moments of the reality that requires their formation’ (Adorno 1990: 11). Conceptualization does thus not mean ‘thinking’ *about* things. Rather, it means thinking *out of* things (33). If it were really *about* things, then conceptualization would be external to its subject matter.

Thought that does not go into its object does not recognize its object. Instead, it treats it as a theoretical hypothesis. Just as the critique of religion does not criticize God on the basis of God, a critical theory of the critique of political economy does not criticize real economic abstractions on the basis of real economic abstractions. Regarding the critique of religion, it thinks out of God to decipher the social relations that assume the form of God and vanish in the idea of God only to reappear as cowed believers in God, mere human derivatives of divine rule. Similarly, the critique of capitalist society is not a critique from the standpoint of economic nature. Like the critique of religion, it too deciphers the definite social relations that manifest themselves in mysterious, seemingly extra-mundane economic forces that prevail in and through the social individuals as personifications of a ghostlike economic objectivity. For a critical social theory, the fetishism of commodities entails the movement of some abstract, by themselves quite incomprehensible, economic forces

that assert themselves over society as if by their own volition. Yet, however objective in its nature, economic nature is in its entirety a socially constituted nature. The question of the social nature of a fateful movement of coins, which has the capacity to force a whole class of people into abject poverty without a moment's notice, is therefore one about the specific character of the capitalistically constituted social relations that assert themselves in the form of a movement of coins beyond human control. The money form disappears as a social relationship, and instead asserts an abstract economic logic, which, for a critical theory of society, manifests the vanished social subject in her own social world as a mere personification of the economic categories. The capitalist social subject is a coined subject, which on the pain of ruin, bloodshed and disaster, entails the promise of freedom as the freedom of money to beget more money.⁷ In this freedom, the social individual is 'governed by the products of his own hand', and it is therefore his own social product that acts 'with the force of an elemental natural process' (Marx 1990: 772). Money does nothing unless it is endowed with a consciousness and a will. In Marx's argument, it is the acting individuals that bestow the economic forces with such an independent will and consciousness, one that 'takes care of both the beggar and the king' (Adorno 1990: 251). In this community of equals before money 'each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the rest. And precisely for that reason, either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the common interest' (Marx 1990: 280). Marx's ironic take on the magic of the invisible hand as the regulative principle of bourgeois freedom as economic compulsion is founded on the understanding that the social practice of the individuals manifests itself not only behind their backs but that it also prevails only in and through them.

The inversion of human practice as an action of things is well focused

⁷ According to Marx's critique, capitalist wealth appears in the form of an equivalent exchange relationship in which 'money...is worth more money'. This manifestation of a 'value which is greater than itself' is core to Marx's conception of capital as a social subject that has 'acquired the occult ability to add value to itself'. He asks, where does it get this quality from, and argues that 'money which begets money' entails the existence of a particular commodity, that is labor power, whose consumption creates this surplus in value (Marx 1990: 257, 255, 256). The comprehension, then, of money as the form of value, does not lie within itself. Rather, and as Adorno put it, the mysterious appearance (*Schein*) of a value equivalence between unequal values (M...M') lies in the concept of surplus value (Adorno 1962/1997: 507-508). The equivalent exchange between the traders of labor power is fundamentally one between the buyers of labor power and the producers of surplus value. On critical theory as a critique of political economy, see Bonefeld (2014a).

by Marx (1973: 239) when he writes in the money fetish that ‘a social relation, a definite relation between individuals...appears as a metal, a stone, as a purely physical external thing which can be found, as such, in nature, and which is indistinguishable in form from its natural existence’. Social objectivity does not lead a life of its own. It is not a force of nature. Rather, it is a socially constituted objectivity – social relations vanish in their appearance as a metal or a stone, and this appearance is as real as the circumstance that the economic object imposes itself on the acting subjects as if regulated by an invisible hand. There is only one world, and that is the world of appearance. What appears in the appearance of society as a ‘stone’ or a ‘coin’ in fateful movement manifests a definite social relationship between individuals subsisting as a relationship between ‘coins’. Marx’s (1973: 832) point that ‘the monstrous objective power which social labour itself created opposite itself as one of its moments’ is key to the critique of political economy as a critical social theory. Not only does he argue that the monstrous economic power is a product of social labor. It is also beyond the control of the social individuals who appear as mere personifications of their own social world. He thus characterizes the commodity as a sensuous supersensible thing. The fetishism of commodities does not disguise the ‘real’ social relations of capitalism. Rather, the fetishism of commodities expresses the ‘real’ social relations in the form of a movement of economic quantities. That is to say, the economic world contains the social individual within itself as the sensuous personification of her own reified social world.

Marx's work focuses on forms, at first on forms of consciousness (i.e., religion and law), then later on the forms of political economy. This focus ‘on forms was identical with the critique of the inverted forms of social existence, an existence constituted by the life-practice of human beings’ (Reichelt 2000: 105). That is, every social ‘form’, even the most-simple form like, for example, the commodity, ‘is already an inversion and causes the social relations to appear as relations between things’, and this appearance is real (Marx 1972: 508). The things objectify themselves in the social individuals as ‘the bearers of particular class-relations and interests’ (Marx 1990: 92). In this inverted world the individuals subsist as coined factors of production, mere human material. However, although coins tend to inflate or become depressed, they are not subjects. Yet, they impose themselves on, and also in and through, the acting subjects to the point of madness and disaster, from the socially necessary consciousness of cash and product, money and profit, to abject misery and bloodshed. Capitalist wealth appears in the form of money as more money, and the necessity of more money objectifies itself in the persons as mere ‘agents

of value' who depend for their life on the manner in which the logic of economic things unfolds.⁸ What a monstrosity! An economic thing, this coin, that in its nature really is nothing more than a piece of metal manifests itself as a seemingly independent economic force, asserting a power by which 'the life of all men hangs by...[to the] vanishing point in the death of all' (Adorno 1990: 320). For the acting subjects, society thus appears as an uncontrollable economic subject to which they are bound by seemingly invisible threads. Indeed, the individuals carry their relationship with society, and, therewith, their access to the means of subsistence, in their pockets.⁹

The problem analyzed here is well focused by Helmut Reichelt. Expounding on Marx's critique of fetishism – human social relations appear as relations between things and this appearance is real – he argues that capitalist exchange relations suggest that rationally acting subjects meet freely in the marketplace to realize their rational interests, whereas in fact they act as executives of abstract social laws which they themselves have generated historically and reproduce through their rational behavior, and over which they have no control. The perception of society thus 'ensues from within the subjects who...make contracts in the sphere of circulation, where they deal in mysterious economic forms with so-called "goods", and who have always already perceived of each other as equal and free subjects of law, and who, prior to this thinly veiled perception of themselves as independent subjects, experience class society as one of inequality, exploitation and rule by an autonomized system' that feeds on the constant accumulation of the profits delivered by the consumption of labor for the sake of more profit (Reichelt 2005: 65). And then, suddenly and without warning, 'society ... finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence; too much industry... And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones' (Marx and Engels 1996: 18-19). Society is thus experienced not only as a

⁸ Marx posits the general formula of capital as 'value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital' (1990, p. 256), and expounds value in process as a process of 'valorization', that is, the *Verwertung* of social labor. Capitalist wealth is entirely abstract or as Bellofiore (2009) put it, value is 'strictly speaking a ghost' – of a social labor 'time made abstract' (Bonefeld 2010: 262).

⁹ On this, see Marx (1973: 156-7).

class society based on inequality, exploitation and domination. It is also experienced as a 'real economic abstraction' that moves in crisis-ridden ways, entailing both chance and necessity, which are experienced as 'fate'. The mythological idea of fate becomes no less mythical when it is demythologized 'into a secular "logic of things"' that akin to an abstract system-logic structures the behaviors of the actual individuals by means of competing price signals and threatens their livelihood through redundancy and therewith loss of access to the means of subsistence (Adorno 1990: 311, 320, 319). That is, the logic of things 'prevails *over* mankind as something that prevails *in* them' as traders in labor power, the one buying to make a profit, the other selling to gain wage-based access to the means of subsistence (Adorno 2008: 26). In this society the products of labor that cannot be converted into money are valueless regardless of the needs that they could satisfy. What has no value in exchange has no utility and is therefore burnt. That is, however much the individual might try to raise herself above the world of the invisible hand, which does indeed regulate the relationships between the economic things, – and raise she must for the sake of maintaining the civil character of capitalist labor economy preventing cut-throat competition and thus 'bloodshed' – she remains a coined subject of price, cash, and profits. The strength of her connection to the means of life depends on the movement of the abstract economic things over which she has no control, and which impose themselves with at times devastating force, cutting society off from the means of subsistence at the blink of an eye. For the producers of surplus value, the inability to sell her redundant labor power spells disaster to the point of destitution and death. What is the price of a kidney?

The perception of the ghostlike compulsion by which capitalist society is characterized ensues not just from the fateful regulation of social reproduction by the invisible hand. It ensues also from the world market as the most developed form of capitalist society. Here it seems as if the 'limits' to 'national wealth', national industry, and national employment and wages, impose themselves upon a hard-working national people seemingly from the outside. National progress appears to be held back by external forces, which are perceived to work against the interests and integrity of a 'national community' of hard-working people. National 'disharmony' and discord seem thus to be caused by some intangible world market forces. In his critique of Carey's economic nationalist ideas, Marx argued forcefully that 'these world-market disharmonies are merely the ultimate adequate expressions of the disharmonies which have become fixed as abstract relations within the economic categories, or which have a local existence on the smallest scale' (Marx 1973: 887). In other words,

global 'disharmony' exists in and through the 'domestic relations' and vice versa. Yet it appears as if the national state, and its national economy, is effectively accountable to, and at the mercy of, a *nebuleuse* personified as the global economy.

The perception of the *nation* as a community of a people who are forced to submit to the exigencies of a global economy is entirely regressive. It lends itself to the ideology of the nation as a subject of liberation, which is as irrational as the belief in a national nature, a national homogeneity of purposes and a national destiny, from the national industry via the national interest and the national history to the national being. The idea of the nation as the foundation of being and becoming recognizes the term 'cosmopolitanism' as a term of abuse. In its stead, it puts its faith in the imagined nation as some naturally rooted and active thing, which it idolizes as the 'spirit of the people'. If indeed it is permissible at all to speak about the national spirit of the people, it is a national spirit not by nature, but by history. By reducing history to nature or by reading nature into history, the struggle for national liberation from the strictures of the world market becomes delusional inasmuch as a people are forced to act as if they really are natural forces that have a national history.¹⁰

ON THE ELEMENTS OF ANTISEMITISM

I have argued that in capitalism the individuals are governed by the fateful movement of economic abstractions. The point of critique can therefore not be to 'make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains' (Marx 1990: 92).¹¹ It is therefore not sufficient to criticize capitalists for their seemingly excessive addiction to profit, nor is it sufficient to criticize bankers for pursuing money for the sake of more money. On the pain of ruin, these behaviors manifest the 'objective necessity' of the capitalistically constituted social relations.

In this context, the question 'what is criticized' becomes an important one. How does one oppose the fateful movement of coins? Who really is responsible? Clearly, the critique of the banker, or any other socio-economic operative in a system that asserts itself as an independent force over and through the social individuals, misses the object of critique. As a critical theory, the critique of political economy is not a critique of the personifications of either the economic categories or the logic that holds sway in them. Rather, it is a critique of the capitalistically organized social

¹⁰ This part draws on Adorno (2008: 100-2).

¹¹ Michael Heinrich argues with similar purpose when he expounds antisemitism as personalization of the capital fetish. See Heinrich (2012: ch. 10.2).

relations of reproduction that assume the form of a movement of economic things, which objectify themselves in the person as the human agent of her own forsaken world.

Nevertheless, while every individual is 'ruled by economic abstractions', the owners of great wealth experience this rule as a source of great enrichment and power. In this context Horkheimer and Adorno have argued that the 'rulers' are safe for as long as the 'ruled' struggle under the spell of the inverted world, in which, say, the cause of financial crisis, economic downturn, conditions of austerity and abject poverty, and competitive pressures are attributed to the greedy behavior of some known peddlers of misery (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 179). A spell-bound critique of capitalism demands more of this and less of that. It attributes the fateful movement of the economic forces to the individual will of the greedy money-maker, apportions blame and proclaims to know 'how to set things right'. It is founded on the rumor that capitalist economy has been corrupted by some greedy self-seekers, and that capitalism can therefore be made to work for the benefit of the national friends once the ghostlike power of the peddlers of misery has been curbed for good. This critique of capitalism does not reject capitalism. It demands a better capitalism, one that manifests the promise of the wealth of nations in opposition to the freedom of world market profits. This critique of capitalism is entirely false to the point of murder. Not only does it leave capitalist society entirely untouched by thought. It also attributes capitalist conditions to the conscious activity of some supposedly guilty party and demands action to sort things out. This personalization of the movement of economic categories entails a number of differentiations, most importantly between the productive or indeed creative capitalist as a 'producer' of 'real' wealth employing a hard-working and creative people, and the financial or indeed parasitic capitalist who makes his fortune by speculating in money to the detriment of the established system of national wealth. Here the distinction between material (national) wealth and the financial wealth of money appears in the forms of distinct personalities – pitting the creative industrialist against the parasitic banker-cum-speculator. There emerges, then, the idea of a capitalism that is corrupted by the financial interests, for the benefit of the few and to the detriment of the many. Finance stands accused for turning capitalism into a profit-making system that at the expense of national industry, national wealth, national progress, and national harmony, seeks money for the sake of more money.

In this view the capital fetish, which manifests itself in the form of money as the 'most senseless, incomprehensible form' of wealth, is not a

fetish at all (Marx 1987: 487). Rather, it presents the wealth of parasites, of some intangible external enemy within, and wealth in money accumulates as the consequence of the allegedly parasitic activity of the bankers, the financiers, and the speculators. In a society that asserts itself behind the backs of the acting subjects, the elements of antisemitism project the acting bearers (*Träger*) of the economic categories of money and finance as the hostile cosmopolitan subject that, having no roots in the industry of the nation, grows rich by speculating on the wealth created by a hard working national people. That is, a definite form of social relations manifests itself in the form of a movement of coins and then, under the spell of this coined movement, rebels against the personifications of a world governed by coins. This rebellion is entirely conformist and regressive. Instead of rejecting the trade in labor power between its buyers and the producers of surplus value, it seeks the promise of freedom from the speculators' yoke and a better market position for itself at the expense of the identified wrongdoer, the so-called merchants of greed. For the sake of the nation, something needs to be. Something can be done! The personalized critique of capitalist social relations is open to abuse from the outset. It thinks akin to a register of blame and, once radicalized to the point of maddening fury, condemns the identified party as a bloodsucker who drains the living life out of the national community of a hard-working people. It demands renewal of the nation, to make the nation strong again, in opposition to the world market society of capital, which is condemned as a network of money and power that conspires against the supposed nature of a national people who appear thus as victims of the cosmopolitan peddlers of greed and their military backers.¹²

The identification of the 'guilty parties' personalizes the relations of economic objectivity. It points the finger accusingly at the identified foe of the national community. Under the spell of identification, it denounces the alleged wrongdoer and once radicalized into blind resentment, becomes demagogic in its demand for retribution. Who hides behind the invisible hand of the market, what is his name, where does he live, how does he look, walk, pray? How can the invisible wrongdoer of the nation be made visible? According to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979), the image of the Jew is ready made for this personalization.

¹² The idea that so-called neoliberal capitalism resulted from a Washington-based agreement between money and power, the so-called 'Washington consensus', purports the idea, at least by implications, of a conspiratorial construction of a finance-driven world economy that, buttressed by the political and military might of the US, exploits the nations of the world for financial gain. The Washington consensus appears thus as a peddlers' construction (see, for example, Petras 2006).

Modern antisemitism feeds on the Christian antisemitism that indicts the ‘Jew’ as the assassin of Jesus and as a trafficker in money, and it thus accuses the Jew to pursue unholy unproductive activities. The image of the Jew is that of a parasite - money and finance, speculators and bankers. ‘No matter what the Jews as such may be like, their image, as that of the defeated people, has the features to which totalitarian domination must be completely hostile: happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth. These characteristics are hated by the rulers because the ruled secretly long to possess them’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 185, 199). The projected Jew thus appears as a figure of undeserved liberation from sweat and toil, that is, as one that does not submit to hard work, factory organization, struggle to make ends meet, and is hated as such. Antisemitism turns the ‘longing’ for a freedom from want and for a life beyond the mere existence as human material of ‘personified labour time’ (Marx 1990: 352-3)¹³ into a devastating rejection: it projects the Jew as the one who lives this life by exploiting the many for monetary gain. The antisemite says, our misery is the foundation of Jewish wealth. Horkheimer and Adorno (1989: 179) thus argue that the ‘rulers’ are safe for as long as the ‘ruled’ struggle under the spell of the inverted world, in which, say, the cause of financial crisis, economic downturn, and conditions of austerity are attributed to the greedy behavior of some identifiable Others. For the apologists of capitalist society, the reference to the invisible hand operates like an explanatory refuge. It explains everything with reference to the Invisible. ‘Starvation is God’s way of punishing those who have too little faith in capitalism’ (Rockefeller Sr., quoted in Marable, 1991: 149). For the antisemite, however, the power of the invisible can be explained – he sees the Jew to stand behind the invisible power of the market.

The category ‘Jew’ does not refer to a concrete person. It refers to an abstraction. For the antisemite the ‘Jew’ is the intangible and all-powerful puppet master of national misery. It is not capitalism as concrete nature that is rejected. What is rejected is the so-called Jewish capitalism, that is, financial capitalism. According to contemporary economic thinking, this capitalism is said to extract ‘financial profit directly out of the personal income of workers and others..., [which] ‘may be called financial expropriation’ (Lapavistas 2012: 16).¹⁴ This argument about financial

¹³ As Marx’s (1976: 127) observed, if ‘time is everything, [then] man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcass’.

¹⁴ Harvey (2004) conceives of financial expropriation as a resumption of primitive accumulation, which he calls accumulation by dispossession.

capitalism denies that capitalism is in fact a monetary system.¹⁵ The point here is neither to reject nor to taint the argument about financial capitalism.¹⁶ The point is rather that its incomprehension of money as the form of value opens the pandoras' box, in which the elements of antisemitism lie in wait. Hardened by the cold stare of the elements of antisemitism, it posits the financialization of capitalism as a suckers' paradise, one in which the promise of opulence for the many brought about by a well-functioning national labor economy is crushed by a few cosmopolitan peddlers of misery. What makes money Jewish, what is a Jewish capitalism, and what is the concrete nature of a (capitalist) labor economy? For the antisemite, this radicalized subject of conformist rebellion, financial capitalism amounts to a Jewish conspiracy. He demands jobs and conditions for a people of an imagined national nature, defined by the camaraderie of soil and blood, and seeks the imaginary power and the money wealth of the projected foe for himself. Antisemitism articulates a senseless and barbaric discontent with conditions. Its rebellion for concrete nature eliminates even the glimpse of a life beyond 'domination'. Because its anti-capitalism leaves capitalism entirely untouched, it is totalitarian in character as it 'it seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination' to the point of utter destruction (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 195). Auschwitz is this destruction. For Adorno, it confirmed the bourgeois relations of pure identity as death. It identified Man as a metaphysical distraction to the business at hand. What counts is what can be numbered and subsists as such in a numbered manner – mere material. Every number is a resource, and if it is not, it is not worth anything at all. What cannot be used (anymore) is gassed and burnt. There is no time to waste.

Arbeit macht frei

It is important to distinguish between the elements of antisemitism and antisemitism. Fundamentally, antisemitism 'is the rumor about Jews' (Adorno 1974: 141). The rumored Jew has no concrete existence. The Jew

¹⁵ The insight that capitalism is a monetary system is of crucial significance to the *Neue Marx Lektüre*, see Backhaus (1975). See also Arthur (2004), Lotz (2014), Heinrich (2017), and Smith (2005).

¹⁶ It is however the case that contemporary populism proclaims against financial globalization ostensibly in order either to make the nation great again or to make the economy work for the many. The difference between these proclamations is most important, and so is the logic that holds sway in the overlap. See Bonefeld (2019).

exists as an abstract and appears as an invisible, entirely intangible and cunning foe who is difficult to pin down. The elements of antisemitism reject the hated forms of capitalism and attribute them to the hidden nature of the intangible Jew, who like the invisible is everywhere and meddles in everything. The elements of antisemitism are innate to the conspiracy theory of capitalist development. According to the rumor, the cunning Jew stands behind phenomena, and who stands behind the phenomena is the hidden and invisible puppet-master of the world. Antisemitism is first of all an attempt at unmasking the Jew by it by desecrating the soil of her final resting place or by attaching a star to her clothes and place of business. It is an attempt at unmasking the grinning speculator behind the human façade. It does not matter who the concrete individual is. What matters is visibility, and what is made visible is marked out for ridicule, arson, and destruction, akin to a fallen star that has come to down earth. What has fallen can be kicked with joyless abandonment and cheerful relentlessness. The elements of antisemitism do not entail the pogrom as its automatic destiny. They prepare the ground, point the finger, spread the rumor, and establish the legitimation for this perverted rebellion against capitalism. Ulrike Meinhof, the late co-founder of the German Red Army Faction, articulated succinctly the rationalization of antisemitism as a hatred of capitalism when she said that ‘Auschwitz meant that six million Jews were killed, and thrown on the waste-heap of Europe, for what they were: money Jews. Finance capital and the banks, the hard core of the system of imperialism and capitalism, had turned the hatred of men against money and exploitation, and against the Jews...Anti-Semitism is really a hatred of capitalism’ (Meinhof, quoted Watson, 1976: 23). When antisemites attack capitalism, what is the measure of success?¹⁷

The previous section argued that according to the antisemites the world is divided between hated forms of capitalism, especially finance and money capital, and concrete nature. The concrete is conceived as immediate, direct, matter for use, and rooted in industry and productive activity. Money, on the other hand, is not only conceived of as the root of all evil, it is also judged as rootless and as existing not only independently from industrial capital but, also, over and against it: for the sake of money as more money erodes the foundation of the nation, its soil and its blood. In this way, money and financial capital are identified with capitalism while industry and productive labor is perceived as constituting the concrete and creative being of a national people. Thus, industry and enterprise are ‘made’ capitalist by (Jewish) money: money penetrates all

¹⁷ On the question of success, see the contributions to Stoetzler (2014).

expressions of industry and thus perverts and disintegrates the community of the people in the name of finance capital's destructive quest for self-expansion. The force and power of money is seen to undermine the individual as entrepreneur; the creative in terms of national industry; the rooted in terms of the imagined traditions of blood and soil; the community in terms of a paternalist direction of use-value production. For the antisemites, then, it is possible not only to embrace capitalism but, also, to declare that labor creates freedom.

The approval of the *Volksgenosse* as the personification of concrete nature, blood, soil, and industry goes hand in hand with the denunciation of the Jew as the personalized power of economic abstractions. In this manner, the ideology of blood and soil, on the one hand, and machinery and unfettered industrial expansion, on the other, are projected as images of a healthy nation that stands ready to purge itself from the perceived enemies of the national economy, that is, the abstract, universal, rootless, mobile, intangible, international 'vampire' of 'Jewish capitalism'. Extermination is itself an effort of concrete nature, and thus industrialized. As *Volksgenossen* they have all committed the same deed and have thus become truly equal to each other: their efficiently discharged occupation only confirmed what they already knew, they had lost their individuality and had instead been set loose as a hard-working subject of extermination. Antisemitism is the national fury that is set loose as the subject of maddened liberation from the identified foe. Its furious affirmation of its own maddening reality is 'the substitute for the dream that humanity could organize its world humanely, a dream that a man-made world is stubbornly rejecting' (Adorno 1986: 182). Indeed, Auschwitz confirmed the 'stubbornness' of the principle of 'abstraction' not only through extermination for extermination's sake but also, and because of it, through 'abstractification'. The abstract concept Jew was made into a numbered cipher and it was then *made* abstract: all that can be used is used like teeth, hair, skin; labor-power; and, finally, what remained was made abstract and thus invisible. The identified puppet master was transformed into smoked-filled air.

Everything is thus changed into pure nature. The economic abstraction was not only personalized, it was also 'abstractified'. At the gate of Auschwitz, the *Volksgenossen* made clear that money does not liberate anybody from concrete nature; in fact, it pronounced with deadly intent that the labor of Auschwitz is to liberate the concrete from the abstract to the vanishing point of death. Not money but labor makes you free – *Arbeit macht frei* – until the laboring ceases. Labor liberates. Normality is death. Industry is the bond of soil and blood. Extermination is efficiently

discharged. It manifests ‘the stubbornness of the life to which one has to conform, and to resign oneself’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 171).

Upon arrival at the factory of death, everybody was assessed for use. Those deemed unable to work were discarded without second thought. Those deemed able to work were worked until liberated from life, until death. Auschwitz was a factory ‘to destroy the personification of the abstract. Its organization was that of a fiendish industrial process, the aim of which was to “liberate” the concrete from the abstract. The first step was to dehumanize, that is, to strip away the “mask” of humanity, of qualitative specificity, and reveal the Jews for what “they really are” – shadows, ciphers, numbered abstraction’, mere disposable human material. Then followed the process to ‘eradicate that abstractness, to transform it into smoke, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material “use-values”: clothes, gold, hair, soap’ (Postone 1986: 313-314). Adorno and Horkheimer’s point that ‘Anti-Semitic behavior is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects’ describes the behavior of a mob (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 171). It does not capture the labor of Auschwitz. Nobody was set loose. Everybody worked in a disciplined manner until the end with relentless dedication to achieve the task at hand. *Arbeit macht frei* addresses the rumor about the easy living Jews with industrialized intent. It says, Jews are put to work here until they are no more and that is our labor of liberation.

CONCLUSION

Capitalist society does not contain within itself the promise of freedom as the secret essence of its future being. It contains within itself the promise of its own falseness. It is not the intension of a critical theory of society to tease the promise of freedom out of society. It does not judge society on the basis of its normative ideal. Its critical intension is to reveal its conceptuality. It wants to know its social nature to understand what it is capable of, and why.

There is, says Adorno (1962: 30), a need for a ‘practice that fights barbarism’, and yet, he argues rightly, there can be no such practice. Barbarism cannot be fought in a direct and immediate manner - what really does it mean to struggle against money, resist the movement of coins, combat the movement of interest rates, fight price movements, and resist poverty in a mode of social reproduction, which entails the ‘pauper’ in its conception of wealth (Marx 1973: 604). A ‘practice that fights barbarism’ is about the social relations that manifest themselves in the logic of

seemingly self-moving economic forces. Clearly, it is impossible to hold coins responsible for their movement. I have argued that the personalized critique of the movement of coins contains the elements of antisemitism. Personalization entails attribution. It attributes the fateful movements of the economic forces to the identifiable image of the national foe and demands retribution. The elements of antisemitism attribute blame and thus personalize the critique of the false society to the point of blind fury. The rumor about the Jew provides an outlet for anger and hatred, and a target, which can be attacked at will.

The rumor about the Jews comprehends nothing. It is therefore all-pervasive and all-embracing. The Jew is said to stand behind the fateful economic phenomena and is thus condemned as a conspiring parasite. This condemnation is totalitarian in character in that it identifies the fateful dynamic of the economic forces with the character of the Jews, and what is identified as Jewish in character is secretly longed for. Innate to (the elements of) antisemitism is the aspiration to live the life of the condemned Jew. The antisemite speculates in death and banks the extracts gold teeth.

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Capitalism, the nation and societal corrosion: Notes on 'left-wing antisemitism'

Marcel Stoetzler¹

This essay aims to contribute to a better understanding of the concept of 'left-wing antisemitism'. It points to 'anti-imperialism', i.e. the nationalist, often culturalist, resistance to the global spread of the capitalist mode of production, as a crucial context of contemporary antisemitism in which the boundaries between 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' are often blurred. The main contention is that the dialectic of capitalism and emancipation is central to understanding antisemitism: the fact that capitalism itself creates the conditions of, and the means for, overcoming capitalism produces the space of confusion in which the concept of 'left-wing antisemitism' emerges. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Antisemitism, Nationalism, Anti-Imperialism, Capitalism, Emancipation, Socialism, Fascism.

INTRODUCTION

The essay is in three parts. The first part (which includes the first three sections) contains historical reflections on the meanings of the concepts 'left-wing' and 'right-wing', relating them to the ideas of the French Revolution, and on the distinction between the three principal types of modern antisemitism, left-wing, right-wing and 'conservative-

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revolutionary'. The middle part contains the main argument, beginning with the fourth section, which argues that Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* contains a dialectical view of capitalism that is not straightforwardly anti-capitalist. This is extended in the fifth section that discusses, in the perspective of the dialectic of capitalism and emancipation, anti-imperialism, cultural nationalism and the ethnicised concept of 'community' inherent in state-centric, bureaucratic multiculturalism. The third part of the essay (sections six to nine) begins with a discussion of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and then moves to some recent debates on cases of 'left-wing antisemitism' that are used to illustrate the main argument.

It is concluded that 'left-wing antisemitism', like the nationalist anti-imperialism that nowadays often provides its context, follows from a failure of anti-capitalists to embrace the corrosive effects capitalism has on enduring oppressive and exploitative societal structures that predate capitalism, such as patriarchy. Antisemitic forms of anti-capitalism refer by 'Jewish capitalism' to corrosive and exploitative capitalism, silently presupposing the possible existence of other, 'non-Jewish' types of capitalism imagined as productive, harmonious and peaceful. Antisemitic forms of anti-Israelism use 'Zionism' as a name of the world's imperialist domination by 'Jewish capitalism' in this particular sense. The confusions involved in these issues lead to a blurring of the meanings of the very concepts 'right-wing' and 'left-wing'.

1. ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT VERSUS ANTISEMITISM OF THE LEFT

The phrase 'left-wing antisemitism' may refer to 'antisemitism *on* the left' or 'antisemitism *of* the left'. The former would be the case of anyone on 'the left' who holds the forms of antisemitism that are common in the wider context, in terms of, for example, social milieu or nationality, relevant to this individual; the latter, by contrast, would be forms of antisemitism specific to the tradition and orientation of 'the left' itself.

The notions of 'left' and 'right', dating from the period of the French Revolution, are usually defined in terms of a commitment to the idea of either the (ontologically given, as well as normatively desired) equality or the natural inequality of all human beings. Beyond that, the notion of 'the left' resonates with *liberté* and *fraternité* in addition to *égalité*, which

makes the issue more complicated.² Antisemitism *of* the left – as it were, ‘genuinely’ left-wing antisemitism – could be defined therefore in the first instance as an antisemitism that presumes that there is something in the essence or spirit of ‘the Jews’ that makes them impediments to the pursuit of the ideas of the French Revolution: the Jews are *by their nature* supporters of the status quo or even of reaction. They are against equality and liberty, let alone fraternity, an accusation that can be found frequently in pamphlets written by nineteenth-century petty-bourgeois antisemites of liberal, democratic or socialist backgrounds. Furthermore, the antisemitism of the left could also be defined as a form of antisemitism that follows from a mechanical, dogmatic and undialectical interpretation of these ideas – *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – themselves. Saying this implies the admission that a left that misreads its own ideals can thereby become its own worst enemy. Adorno reacted to this form of antisemitism with his famous reference to ‘the state of things [Zustand] where one can be different without fear’³ as the longed-for state of things: a state of equality that allows for difference. This points to a question that is central to Critical Theory: how can we articulate a defence of difference within the framework of a belief in equality? Within the Marxist canon, the first important treatment of this problem is Marx’s own ‘On the Jewish question’.⁴ Reflections on how capitalist modernity *creates* but also *undermines* equality and sameness, difference and identity, particularism and universalism in their dialectical interplay can be found in contemporary discussions of race, class, sex and gender, and others: all emancipatory social movements of the last century or so have reflected, in different manners, on the dialectic of difference and equality.⁵ Critical Theory links these issues to the commodity form, which produces the totalizing dynamic characteristic of modern society whose chief mechanism of mediation it is:⁶ the capitalist mode of production produces

² Solty (2015) restates the more traditional definition that references the entire trinomial phrase and therewith includes liberalism in the concept of ‘the left’. Bobbio (1996, chapters 6-8) argues for a simplified definition that equates ‘leftism’ with egalitarianism only, which means that ‘classical’ liberalism is out, given that liberty as such is not a ‘left-wing’ value for him, whereas ‘social liberalism’ is included. I find the trinomial definition is more in keeping with actual usage of the concept. The fact that it is vaguer and contradictory is a reflection of the reality of its referent.

³ Adorno 1978, #66

⁴ Fine 2014

⁵ Wallerstein (c.g. 1990) and Postone (1993, page 396) can be seen as converging on this, although coming from reassuringly different directions. On Postone’s argument in relation to social movements, see Stoeztler 2004.

⁶ Postone 1980; 1986; 2003

a schizophrenic reality of total, mind-numbing sameness based on antagonism, separation and a bad infinity of particularisms. Similarly, albeit coming from a different theoretical background, Etienne Balibar gave expression to this in his formulation that racism is ‘encore un universalisme’, ‘yet another form of universalism’: although racism professes to be a strong form of particularism and claims to defend difference, it is also a universalism, one of the signatures of the global order.⁷

In practice, a left-wing racist or antisemite will usually be both, a racist *in spite of* being a leftist, and *because of* being a racist *kind of* leftist, at the same time: on the one hand, a particular individual who is predominantly a leftist may, at the same time, be a bit of a conservative or a reactionary, but on the other hand his or her leftism may be of the unreflective, mechanical kind that *in itself* has a racist dimension.

The same conceptual problem arises when one tries to chart nationalism in terms of the left or the right: modern nationalism itself is linked historically to the French Revolution and has been an aspect of most liberal, democratic and socialist movements throughout the last two hundred years. Seen in this perspective, *nationalist* antisemitism – antisemitism in the service of building the nation that most factions of ‘the left’ have always assumed will deliver legal equality, welfare and dignity for all its members – should be categorized as a form of *left-wing* antisemitism. Any nationalism, as ‘left-wing’ as it can possibly be, must at least *sotto voce* define who belongs and who does not belong to the nation and is therefore deserving of its solidarity, and therefore relies on some set of mechanisms of exclusion: a nation without boundaries is not a nation.

Historically speaking, nationalism first of all has been a project of the liberal, democratic and socialist movements of the nineteenth century. However, since the nation-form has become the established, predominant political form of capitalist society in the world-system, a process that was more or less completed in the post-WW2 era of decolonization, it is, in fact, a *conservative* political form: seen in this perspective, accordingly,

⁷ Balibar (1989a; b). As much as the concept of the ‘universally human’ cannot be defined except in terms of criteria which throw up boundary problems that destabilize the concept, as much racism is a universal social form in modern society (the world system). Racism produces communities by creating, together with sexism, ‘types of ideal Humanity’. Although it does so differently in every specific racial context, it does so universally. Balibar argues that racism cannot therefore be fought by simply invoking universalism – the constitution of a new kind of universalism is required (which is similarly suggested by Postone on the last pages of *Time, Labour and Social Domination* [Postone 1993], concluding a completely different theoretical argument.)

the antisemitism of nationalists, including anti-imperialist or postcolonial nationalists, is a form of conservative, right-wing antisemitism in spite of its 'left-wing' nineteenth-century roots. 'Left' and 'right', progressive and conservative, fail to function as classificatory categories in the case of a political form, the nation, that is fundamentally ambiguous: the nation-form stands for a conservative kind of progressiveness, circumscribed emancipation, equality by way of difference, unity through separation.⁸ 'Left' and 'right' are useful in this context only as dynamic, historical-dialectical categories, not as logical-classificatory categories.

2. THE THREE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF MODERN ANTISEMITISM

The messy phenomenon of antisemitism can be broken down into three types that tend to have different effects. *For one*, there is the kind of anti-Jewish snobbery that primarily flourishes in upper class circles where it is practiced as a conventional means of bonding and boundary maintenance, not as a quack medicine to soothe grievances about capitalist modernity; after all, those who do not suffer the grievances do not need the medicine. The lucky few take capitalism as much for a natural phenomenon as patriarchy, aristocracy, Christianity and the straight mind, and do not suffer from any paranoid sentiment such as that globalization or the 'Judaization' of society threatened their 'cultural identity': they know too well how society *actually* works to fall for any such nonsense.

Second, there is the liberal, democratic and socialist antisemitism, dating from the nineteenth century, which denounces 'the Jews' as allies of the old regime – a 'financial aristocracy' that props up a modern form of feudalism. This form of antisemitism constitutes a misguided attempt to explain the failure of post-1789 modernity – liberalism, capitalism, republicanism, democracy, socialism – to usher in a New Jerusalem. Although a nineteenth-century phenomenon, it inherits older conservative-agrarian, anti-commercial ideologies that depicted 'usury', the 'sterile' begetting of money off money as immoral and found acceptable only wealth that is earned the sweaty way from working in the fields and workshops.⁹ This 'producerist' kind of ideology is prone to turn antisemitic when circumstances and cultural traditions make it plausible, i.e., when there is a cultural tradition that depicts Jews as money-grabbing

⁸ Debord 1992, #54 and #72

⁹ Such agrarian ideology was classically expressed by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas but was already found in the Torah. On the role of the notion of 'making (people) productive' for antisemitism see Bermann (1973).

non-producers. (Depending on historical context, other population groups may be stereotyped this way and cast accordingly.)

These two forms of antisemitism are exactly opposed to each other in their commitment to the concepts of equality and inequality respectively: the right-wing form hates the Jews as equalizers and levellers, newcomers who destroy natural differences and hierarchies (caste or estate systems, patriarchy, etc.); the left-wing form sees them standing in the way of a more equal, emancipated, fair and just society. Rather than melting into the new ‘society of equals’,¹⁰ the Jews stubbornly remain allies of the old regime of the aristocracy, or of whatever social forces appear as its inheritors: imperialism, or the USA, or the cosmo-metropolitan elites – the latter being relevant especially when the emancipatory goal is to be achieved through a nationalist kind of socialist democracy ‘in one country.’

These two classic nineteenth-century forms of modern antisemitism – in a conventional sense ‘right-wing’ and ‘left-wing’ respectively – mostly produce discrimination and exclusion, as well as occasionally pogroms. This distinguishes them from the third, most modern type that is much more consistently and dynamically violent and tends towards genocide: the antisemitism that is part of *conservative-revolutionary* ideology, which comes in a range of varieties from fascist-plebeian to aristocratic-clerical.¹¹ In this ideology, ordinary resentment, envy and sadism have been translated into the quasi-metaphysical expectation that salvation of the world will come from the destruction of the Jews. Although ultra-conservative (it wants to restore ‘natural hierarchy’), it is also meta-political, aiming to transcend the categories of ‘left’ and ‘right’. Its anti-bourgeois, anti-liberal and seemingly anti-capitalist aspects have always confused and attracted some of those on both ‘the right’ and ‘the left’ broadly conceived.¹²

¹⁰ The notion of a ‘society of equals’ was shared in the nineteenth century by liberal, democratic and socialist traditions that would have differed in *what kind of* ‘society of equals’ they aimed for.

¹¹ On the concept of ‘Conservative Revolution’, see the source materials in Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg (1994), which illustrate the concept well. Although he rejects the concept, Breuer (1990) gives a very good survey of what it means, including how nebulous it inevitably is (analytical precision is not a natural characteristic even of the brightest minds of the far right). See also Herf (1984); a different twist on Herf’s ‘reactionary modernism’ argument, closer to Frankfurt School Critical Theory, is by Rohkrämer (1999). See also Pfahl-Traugher (1998) and Bar-On (2011).

¹² Rebecca Pierce (2019) makes a similar argument on the occasion of an antisemitic shooting in Jersey City in the USA in 2019: ‘Though movements like BHI [Black Hebrew Israelites] and NOI [Nation of Islam] are often labelled as [left-wing] ... they are

The antisemitism of the first two types has been described as a ‘cultural code’.¹³ A code by definition *stands for* something else: the snobbish-conservative and the liberal-socialist antisemitisms point to a larger agenda that has nothing intrinsically to do with Jews. Hating Jews is a sign of distinction, a badge of honour signalling a commitment to this or that social and political agenda. (And, of course, a sign of the asinine silliness of people whose politics follow from their desire to be devotees of this or that cult, racket or milieu.) By contrast, the more modern, twentieth-century, revolutionary, ontological, utopian, eliminatory, cosmological, apocalyptic, eschatological antisemitism is cut from a different cloth: it does not ‘stand for’ anything else. It is what it is: genuine, raw, visceral hatred that has its own rationality, energy and logic. This third type of antisemitism, the far-right, conservative-revolutionary type, which is a key ingredient of fascist antisemitism, is more than just a more extreme version of the ‘antisemitism as cultural code.’ It is a phenomenon of its own kind.¹⁴

3. BEYOND LEFT AND RIGHT: ‘CONSERVATIVE-REVOLUTIONARY’ ANTISEMITISM

Genocidal and eliminatory antisemitism, the full-blown Nazi variety, is part of the modern, *conservative-revolutionary* reaction to modernity. Failure to distinguish it from all the more ordinary forms, evil, damaging and repulsive as they are, amounts to relativizing or downplaying, if not denial, of the Holocaust (its *Verharmlosung* in the pertinent German term – ‘making it appear to be rather harmless’). Although it is tempting to do so, one must not transfer the opprobrium that belongs to the Holocaust to descriptions of the casual stupidities of everyday forms of racism. The well-intended injunction ‘Wehret den Anfängen’ – you must nip these sort of things in the bud; a stitch in time saves nine – is misleading as the genocide of the Holocaust is not simply an augmented version of an antisemitic Twitter meme. Although a car and a tank both have wheels and a gearbox, the engine makes the difference, and each vehicle serves

actually culturally conservative and invested in patriarchal family values, homophobia, free market capitalism, and opposition to abortion and miscegenation’.

¹³ The background and genesis of this phrase, famously coined by Shulamit Volkov, is explained succinctly in a more recent contribution (Volkov 2006). She describes her experience of ‘campus antisemitism’ in the 1960s as an ideology that treated ‘the Jew’ as a sort of free-floating signifier for a variety of other things and ideas, rather than constituting an actual genocidal threat.

¹⁴ On the other hand, though, the fact that some individuals do cross over from the latter to the former may suggest that the meta-political virus is already built into the ‘antisemitism as cultural code.’ There is perhaps a hidden code within the code.

entirely different purposes. Although garden-variety antisemites do sometimes turn into fascist ones, the more important issue is that the widely shared, socially accepted, non-fascist forms of antisemitism protect fascist antisemites from detection. This was very helpful to Hitler: for far too long, too few people took his ‘conservative-revolutionary’ antisemitism for more than ‘mere’ rhetoric of the kind that had become familiar as a ‘cultural code’ and was not to be taken literally. Likewise, today, apocalyptic antisemites with machine guns will find it easier to hide the more the internet is teeming with garden-variety, cultural-resentment antisemites left, right and centre.

Radical antisemitism – the kind that is more than a ‘cultural code’ – is meta-political.¹⁵ Its principal strength and attraction lies in its being beyond ordinary politics: it connects to and invites the opposite side. The ambiguous meaning of the word ‘Socialism’ in its name was crucial to the success of National Socialism, as it allowed the party to reach out across class divides. At the same time, the word ‘National’ reduced the ambiguity of the ‘Socialism’ to a safe minimum: Hitler was perfectly clear that his was a *community*-based socialism ‘the German way’, i.e. without the corrosive Jewish-Marxist bits about class struggle. Importantly, this was not ‘code’ – it was what it was, singularly brutal and eliminatory. This puts it into a category all its own. Nevertheless, it also belongs into the much wider category of nationalist socialisms that affirm the capitalist mode of production but claim to be ‘anticapitalist’ in their rejection of some aspects of capitalist circulation and reproduction – greedy immoral bankers who behave like locust swarms, for example – and seek a solution to ‘the social question’ at the level of the nation.¹⁶ There are many of those, and they are not about to disappear. They are by nature receptive to antisemitism if and when the cultural-historical context makes ‘the Jews’ plausible victims whose destruction is expected to serve national regeneration or liberation. (Depending on context, other racisms might work better.) These contexts matter: the racist ‘codes’ that ordinarily prevail in them either promote or obstruct the progress of the fascists.

¹⁵ ‘Meta-political’ denotes a move away from, or beyond, party politics and the framework of nation-states towards the level of culture, ‘race’ or civilization (Payne 1995). The term seems to have been coined by Ernst Nolte in *Three Faces of Fascism* (1966).

¹⁶ When National Socialism vacillated between cosmic-racial-civilizational meta-politics and, in a more prosaic register, extreme ‘palingenetic’ (rebirth-) nationalism, the latter was both the basis of the former and the default fall-back option when the cosmic ambitions hit the buffers.

4. CONSERVATIVE VERSUS CORROSIVE CAPITALISM

Although it does not mention it, the most important text for understanding modern antisemitism is Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. Its first section sets out with relish why the ruling classes of Europe had to fear capitalist modernity that increasingly, whether they liked it or not, was becoming the material basis of modern domination and exploitation, and which they could only adopt, or be swept away by. The bourgeoisie, by which they actually meant the capitalists as Engels later clarified in a footnote, destroyed all ideas of 'natural' superiority or hierarchy, all sentimental illusions and prejudices, including religion, family, patrimonialism, parochialism and nationality: rational, egotistic, centralising, state-building but cosmopolitan capitalism seems to signal here the end of ideology as new illusions are outdated before they can even 'ossify'. Communism appears as a 'spectre', a conspiracy of shady, isolated radical individuals, only to those who fail to see it as the product of the dialectical dynamics of the bourgeois mode of production. Behind the alleged uncanniness of communism stood the Jekyll and Hyde-character of capitalism itself that not only has destroyed the old regime, but also has produced, in the proletariat whose humanity it negates, its own imminent negation.¹⁷ The remainder of the *Manifesto* elaborates on the notion that communism is *not* that spectre-like conspiracy but the light-as-day consequence of the bourgeois order, and lays out what the communists should avoid being: nationalist, sectarian, secretive, positivist, and authoritarian. The communists only need to abolish institutions that are *in their bourgeois form* chimerical already, such as property, nationality and family: the latter are the spectres as they hardly exist. No mystery here, no secret blueprint, no conspiracy.

¹⁷ This argument, very condensed in the *Manifesto*, is first developed in the *German Ideology*. Lenin echoed this train of thought on the concluding pages of *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* ('The "Mission" of Capitalism') when he asserted that '[r]ecognition of the progressiveness of [the historical role of capitalism in the development of Russia] is quite compatible ... with the full recognition of the negative and dark sides of capitalism' (Lenin 1956, p. 654). He attacks the Narodniki for claiming 'that an admission of the historically progressive nature of capitalism means an apology for capitalism', thereby making invisible its contradictions. Lenin briefly mentions the 'increase in the productive forces of social labor' and then goes into much more detail on 'the socialisation of that labor', which he defines quite broadly. Apart from all the usual suspects (expansion of production, centralisation, mobility, urbanisation) he also mentions that 'capitalism eliminates the forms of personal dependence that constituted an inalienable component of preceding systems of economy', naming 'patriarchalism' in particular, that 'capitalist society increases the population's need for association' and effects a 'change in the mentality of the population' (357-9).

Understanding the dialectic of capitalist civilization itself, and the dialectical dependency of the communist movement on capitalist modernity, requires dialectical thinking, which probably springs from an individual's strongly felt experience of non-identity. In a world that sees identities everywhere, admitting non-identity is hard to do. Those lucky (or unlucky) enough to be identical to themselves, smug, happy, undisturbed, well-balanced, integrated masters (or mistresses) of their own houses, are likely to find ways of thinking about the dialectical realities of our civilization that will de-dialecticize and obscure them. To recognise the self-destructive dynamics of the capitalist mode of production as the engine on which rests our hope of overcoming capitalism is perhaps the hardest thing to think. It is easier to think either of ourselves as 'the other' of capitalism that will confront and defeat it (say, David 'Lifeworld' fighting Goliath 'System'), or else to confront bad (bureaucratic, 'iron cage', alienating, greedy) from the standpoint of good (heroic, ethical, fair-trade, productive, creative) capitalism. Robbed of its dialectical dynamics, thinking becomes dichotomous. The third section of the *Manifesto* consists of a roll-call of contemporary socialisms, and all are censured for lacking a dialectical understanding of capitalism and its overcoming; closer inspection would show that quite a few of those at the receiving end of Marx and Engels' polemic also showed elements of antisemitism, the 'socialism of fools'.¹⁸

In a world that has the nation state for one of its principal political structures, benign, productive, harmonious, all-round enriching capitalism is most easily imagined as a nationalist form of state capitalism (aka 'socialism'). Anything national, though, can easily tip over into its racial complement.¹⁹ Depending on context, capitalism with, say, German characteristics can morph into 'Aryan' capitalism and back, and needs to define itself against the foil of French, English, Yankee or Jewish capitalisms, as the case may be. The dichotomy between a German and a

¹⁸ The *Manifesto* (first published in early 1848) does not engage with antisemitism, which probably did not seem like an important enough dividing line at the time. Marx had famously called out and challenged Bruno Bauer's opposition to Jewish emancipation a few years earlier in his review essay 'On the Jewish question' (1844). Engels later (1877/78) devoted one of his most influential books to a comprehensive critique of the socialist philosopher Eugen Dühring, whose antisemitism Engels mentions in passing. Like Bruno Bauer in the 1860s, Dühring became in the 1880s one of the most radical antisemites of the time. Although Marx and Engels did not develop an actual critique or theory of antisemitism, it is arguably no coincidence that some of those against whom they directed their fiercest polemics were, or became, key figures of political antisemitism.

¹⁹ Balibar (1991)

Jewish 'kind' of capitalism, the former concrete and wealth-creating, 'schaffend', the latter abstract, exploitative and value-appropriating, 'raffend', is one of the elements of continuity that linked the antisemitism of nineteenth-century German liberals such as Gustav Freytag or Heinrich von Treitschke,²⁰ and that of socialists who dreamed of harmonious, national-capitalist development such as Eugen Dühring, to Hitler's.

Without a concept of capitalism that differs from that which underpins antisemitic 'anti-capitalism' it is impossible to argue that the latter is not an anti-capitalism at all, or at least not one that might lead to emancipation.²¹ Marx spent the two decades after 1848 to develop this concept; the helplessness of most liberals and socialists in dealing with antisemitism in their own ranks stems not least from their lack of a theoretically grounded critical concept of capitalism.

5. IMPERIALISM, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES, CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION

Modern antisemites dismissed the Marxist labour movement as a 'Jewish-capitalistic' movement, a false flag operation by the Golden International, because they may have sensed correctly that Marx's perspective was not straightforwardly anti-capitalist but in an ironic sense *pro-through-and-beyond-capitalist*.²² The Marxian conception of transcending the capitalist mode of production depends on the latter's own dynamics, and relies therefore on capitalism's most advanced version, not on one tamed by subjection to the benign authority of the state. In the name of the dialectical view of capitalism expressed in the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels fought any suggestion the labour movement should ally itself with anti-liberal conservatives and the Christian ethics of their ever-so-benign monarchy. Their antisemitic (and anti-dialectical) opponents might well have taken this as confirmation of their belief that the 'red' and the 'golden international', led apparently by Marx and the Rothschild family respectively, were essentially the same thing.

Authoritarian and patriarchal anti-liberalism driven by religious ethics has been more warmly welcomed by some on the contemporary left, however. The charisma that the clergy of many oppressed groups hold makes some leftists oblivious to obvious flaws, like their antisemitism,

²⁰ Achinger and Stoetzler (2013)

²¹ On the relationship between anti-capitalism and emancipation see Stoetzler 2012.

²² 'Ironic' not in the sense of 'jocular' but in the sense of 'historical irony', i.e. a dialectical process in which a historical force produces the opposite of what it seems, or perhaps intends, to be producing.

homophobia and sexism, none of which a secular comrade could get away with. The divine inspiration does its confusing magic at all levels, the geopolitical, the national and the municipal: some on the left, broadly conceived, enter foolish associations with ultra-conservative forces globally in the fight against imperialism as well as domestically in the context of state-managed forms of multiculturalism. Both rely on a culturalist vision of modern society that is very conservative.

The meaning of ‘anti-imperialism’ obviously depends on what anyone believes ‘imperialism’ to be, a term that bundles together a range of phenomena. Lenin synthesized the notion of imperialism developed by socialist economics with discussions within British New Liberalism, in particular John A. Hobson (the textbook case of a liberal antisemite).²³ The Leninist claim that imperialism represents the ‘highest stage’ of capitalism presupposes the misleading bourgeois rhetoric of ‘stages’ and implicitly suggests that in its ‘highest stage’ the defining features of capitalism are not generalized commodity production any longer, wage labour and the appropriation of the surplus product – that is, the product of wage labour beyond the exchange value of labour power as expressed in the wage – but something else that is somehow more modern and more relevant. This suggests that capitalism has changed.

Of course, any anti-capitalist will want to fight capitalism where it is at its ‘highest stage’, and if one believed this to be ‘imperialism’, then anti-imperialism would have to carry more weight than any of the more old-fashioned struggles that relate to capitalism’s presumably not so high stages, like trade-unionism, women’s emancipation and others. The charge of ‘imperialism’ can mean entirely different things, though. Some, following Marx’s position, have accused European imperialists of *preventing* the global spread of the capitalist mode of production from destroying conservative social and cultural structures that stand in the way of human emancipation, notably clerical and other anti-rational forms of the cultural legitimation of domination. This was a critique of the fact that metropolitan capitalism is quite happy to maintain and utilize ‘traditional’ social forms of oppression and domination, especially in the periphery. Still, in the 1970s this would have been the predominant liberal and Marxist position: cynical and greedy Europeans try to prevent capitalist development elsewhere, thereby preventing the globalisation of the conditions for overcoming capitalism itself. Others, by contrast, accuse imperialism of actually doing what Marx in fact had *hoped* it would do: globalizing a secular modernity that would help destroy the cultural and

²³ Feldman 2019.

political muck of ages as well as modernity's own principal engine, capitalism. This seems now the predominant position of 'the left', though: imperialism is fought because it destroys cultural identities and imposes universally identical monoculture.²⁴ Whereas 'Frankfurt School' Critical Theory reformulated the Marxian notion of the dialectical dynamic of capitalist modernity by updating and detailing the account of its more modern horrors while maintaining the basic position that there is no alternative to trusting the redemptive powers of the dialectic of civilization ('the Enlightenment', as they call it), those who reject the Marxian dialectic give up on the notion of modernity as more humane and liberating: they embrace what in fact is the conservative critique of capitalist modernity that Marx spent a lifetime fighting against. Cultural reactionaries and nationalists in various parts of the world have come to use anti-imperialism as a cover under which they fight back against modernity's own – still largely undelivered – promise of emancipation, adopting to this end some of the more reactionary aspects of Western modernity itself, such as elements of the philosophy of twentieth-century European 'revolutionary conservatism'. The authors of the *Communist Manifesto* would be horrified to see how many of those they ridiculed as the 'true', conservative, bourgeois and aristocratic socialists are still around, and that some of those calling themselves 'Marxists' support them. Given the dangers of this situation, it is imperative that those who use 'imperialism' as a category of analysis make any support of anti-imperialism dependent on what the specific *social content* of any particular anti-imperialist struggle is: *in the name of which societal goals and to which effects is the struggle being conducted?* If the expansion of capitalist modernity is a dialectical, contradictory force that creates labour as well as capital, racist particularism as well as anti-racist universalism,²⁵ expressly rigid gender norms as well as the destabilization of gender norms, then anti-imperialism, even more than anti-capitalism, is as insufficiently precise a category as to be virtually useless.²⁶

Domination by capital and state keeps defeating and frustrating our longing for community, whether we acknowledge it or not. The classless community of struggle, the utopian lifeworld where we live the future already in the here and now is mostly imaginary, except at best for brief moments of effervescence – maybe a good old protest or a walkout. Some kids, by contrast, reportedly were so extremely bored by uninspired lives in London and elsewhere that they turned a negative theological-political

²⁴ Stoeztler 2018

²⁵ Wallerstein 1990

²⁶ Stoeztler 2016 and 2018

utopia into full-on psychotic suicide trips. For others, projecting the suppressed communitarian longing in the imaginary mode onto some faraway place is a good enough alternative. Some end up venerating even the most reactionary of the enemy's supposed enemies from a distance. Being too liberal and sensible to fall for the charms of any 'prophets of deceit' themselves, they vicariously partake in the deceit suffered by others elsewhere.²⁷

But sometimes the oriental non-place is just down the road. The imperialist logic of divide-and-rule that nineteenth-century liberals developed, complete with sociological and anthropological scholarly superstructure, in the colonies, is also manifest in the metropole in the form of management-by-empowerment of 'the communities'. State-centric multiculturalism, a governmental technique for conditioning the societal multiculturalism that is the normal reality of modern urban everyday life, tends to consolidate the power of established 'community leaders'. The communitarian-managerial version of multiculturalism empowers ultra-conservatives if they succeed to establish themselves as the 'community leaders'. It allows them to mirror the rebels overseas, fighting 'westoxification' and uppity women in the belly of the beast and within the moderating restrictions of metropolitan liberal democracy.²⁸ When the Greater London Council pioneered state-managed communitarianism in the early 1980s, the most notorious case of multicultural liberalism inadvertently empowering ultra-conservatives was that of Hindu fundamentalism. In its own kind of self-defeating dialectic, 'empowering communities' in the struggle against White British racism weakened the left's own resistance to ultra-conservatism in places where it did not recognise it thanks to its Eurocentric blinkers.²⁹ Perfectly mainstream

²⁷ Lowenthal and Guterman 1949; Kahn-Harris 2019, pp. 100-101

²⁸ 'Westoxification', or 'occidentosis' is a term denoting cultural imperialism (Western culture being 'toxic') in Khomeinist ideology. The term was first coined by a secular admirer of Khomeini, Jalal Al-e Ahmad (Abramson 2017).

²⁹ Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis, '[Refusing Holy Orders](#)', first in *Marxism Today* March 1990, page 34; see also their edited 1992 book of the same title. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis have analysed the ambiguities of 'community' and bureaucratic multiculturalism already in their *Racialized Boundaries* (1992). Cooper's (2012) argument that Tory conservatism parallels that of Muslim fundamentalists can be extended to the lower-case conservatism of Labour in both its Blairite and anti-Blairite versions. A discussion of multiculturalism also undergirds Keith Kahn-Harris' recent book on the 'strange hate' of 'selective' antisemitism and 'selective' antiracism (2019). He argues that ordinary convivial multiculturalism presupposes a high level of benign ignorance of who all those others around us in fact are. This ignorance has been undermined by massively increased availability of information about everybody (188). Being better informed, both racism and anti-racism become selective: some racists find

politicians do their bit to empower the ‘community leaders’ of embattled and racialized minorities in the metropole in good faith without asking about the class, age and gender structures of these ‘communities’. Beyond this, they might also, perhaps as part of their efforts to jazz up their street cred, broadcast their sympathies for Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah and others. Islamism and other forms of modern ‘fundamentalism’ developed in tandem with and took inspiration from the European, anti-Enlightenment, post-WW1 Conservative Revolution (such as via the Muslim Brotherhood’s influential theorist, Sayyid Qutb).³⁰ As it

they actually quite like some Jews, for example, and some anti-racists discover they find some Jews, for example, hateful. Rather than shouting ‘Death to all Jews’, ‘selective antisemites’ are ‘intensely interested in and even knowledgeable about’ Jews and their politics; they ‘seek out Jews for approval or damnation’ (48). One of the central issues in the UK debates on antisemitism on the left is, he writes, that most British Jews have adopted a form of Zionism as part of their ‘identity’. When a political conviction is transformed into a part of an identity, it becomes non-negotiable. Therefore, ‘[w]hen Zionism and the legitimacy of the state of Israel are attacked, many Jews experience this as antisemitism. Those doing the attacking usually find this incomprehensible at the very least’ (10) because they think they are attacking merely a political idea that is by definition negotiable. Calling, in turn, those ‘selective antiracists’ antisemites hits them where it hurts most – in their identity as antiracists. Kahn-Harris suggests treating ‘group identities’ as ‘social facts’ (8), basically accepting that wherever we stand, there will always be a lot of obnoxious people around. Multiculturalism means that ‘[s]omehow, we have to find a way to get along with people we hate’ (8), while trying to hate individuals only rather than entire categories of people. (As a card-carrying Adornoite, my own preferred multicultural would be one of non-identity, i.e. identity against all identifications, of course, but this will be for another day.) ‘Celebrating diversity’, though, is either naïve or dangerous as it must lead to disappointment (190). Kahn-Harris concludes: ‘The kind of love that leads to idealising the other and projecting one’s fantasies onto them has damaged Jews and Palestinians’ (218).

³⁰ ‘Salafism is a political formation of the Far Right, one that is singularly focused on the sacralization of virtuous womanhood’ (Cooper 2013, p. 30). The connection between the German/French/Italian tradition of ‘Conservative Revolution’ and Islamism has been made by a variety of authors, including Al-Azmeh (1991 and 2009); Bassi (2010); Bhatt (2006; 2014); Cooper (2008, 2013); Halliday (2007). On the concept of ‘fundamentalism’, see Cowden and Sahgal (2017); Zubaida (2011); McDonald (2014); Women Living Under Muslim Law (2005). Qutb’s text ‘Our struggle with the Jews’, a key source of Islamist antisemitism first published in or around 1951 but disseminated widely only in the 1970s, is contained in Nettler (1987). Other source texts are included in Euben and Zaman (2009). Al-Azm (1993, p. 79) makes an important two-pronged argument in defence of using the concept of ‘fundamentalism’, which stems from the context of Christianity, also in the context of Islam: first, all forms of ‘fundamentalism’ are responses to the same global societal transformations irrespective of which particular cultural or national contexts they are articulated in; second, in the cases of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, these contexts themselves are in fact much less different from one another, in the larger scheme of things, than is usually assumed, and importantly, than their ‘fundamentalist’ proponents claim. The claim that there are civilizations so

befits a totality, micro and macro levels are here in striking harmony: the same type of reactionaries who are unintentionally empowered as ‘community leaders’ to gain oversight over a women’s refuge in London are also encouraged, at the level of postcolonial and world politics, to lead the charge in the struggle against imperialism. Ken Livingston’s hosting of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, the ‘spiritual leader’ of the Muslim Brotherhood, at London’s City Hall in 2004 symbolized both tendencies in a single act. Both communitarianism – initially invented as a strategy of imperial rule³¹ – and anti-imperialism, antisemitic undertones included (as in J. A.

fundamentally different that they are bound to ‘clash’ is already a fundamentalist claim. Al-Azmed (2009) discusses a wide range of points of contact between Islamism and modern European anti-Enlightenment and Romantic thought, partly in terms of direct influences, partly in terms of shared origins in early modern and Enlightenment thought and its contradictions. Central ideas are the uniqueness of Islamic government that is neither categorizable with any of the established concepts such as liberalism or socialism, nor applicable to other civilizations; at the same time, it aims to bring about a society in a state of nature, or of ‘natural reason’, at which history will end and of which the pristine community of early Islam was a utopian premonition. Al-Azmeh points to the influence of a French proto-fascist, Alexis Carrel whose writings on the ‘degeneracy’ of modern society and the need for an elite for the salvation of civilization ‘entranced Islamist authors like Qutb and Shariati’ (Al-Azmed 2009, 30). The philosophical naturalism that undergirds political Islam ironically results in extreme voluntarism and a nihilistic lack of concern for the specific historical conditions of political action, and the embrace of clandestine, avant-garde and putschist practices that are thoroughly modern, nineteenth-century inventions (31). Cooper (2008) writes that Qutb understands capitalism as the expression of excessive, unregulated desire; his is a form of anti-capitalism that is centrally concerned with women’s labour, understood as generalized prostitution and corrosive of societal order. She argues that Qutb translates the concerns of the Conservative Revolution from the Christian idiom into an Islamic one. The Islamist vision is therefore, as Cooper states, ‘in perfect alignment with the political transformations of the British and US neoliberal state over the last decades, which has progressively sought to outsource social service provision to the faith-based initiative’ (Cooper 2008, 28).

The argument made by some in ‘the West’ that Islam as such is *intrinsically* judeophobic, or even antisemitic, is diametrically opposed to the position adopted here as it means agreeing with Qutb’s reading of the foundational texts. It seems to me more plausible to say that Qutb projected the vision of the *Protocols* – without actually referencing them – into the ‘sacred texts’. Methodologically speaking, those who want to make the argument that Islam *as such* is judeophobic would need to demonstrate not only that there are judeophobic passages in the ‘sacred texts’, which is surely the case, but to what extent these are in fact *constitutive* of the overall thrust of the religion. This is what theology does: it constructs a larger meaning out of a body of ‘sacred’ text that in itself is inevitably contradictory and polyvalent, by asking, what is the relative importance of different parts of the text. For a historical critique of the concept of ‘Islamic antisemitism’ see Schroeter (2018).

³¹ Mantena, Karuna (2010). *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*. Princeton University Press

Hobson), are legacies of late nineteenth-century liberalism. Not incidentally, the former mayor of London, Ken Livingston, made his name first as an expert in modern municipal administration³² (a classic strength of urban liberals since the nineteenth century) and only later, less successfully, as a commentator on modern German history.³³

Due to its dissemination in the hand luggage of Western civilization, modern political antisemitism has turned from a European problem into a global one that is now probably more pervasive than ever. The unpredictable feedback loops of globalization make some immigrant groups in Europe hire religious instructors from their (imaginary or actual) countries of origin who re-import to them in the name of ‘authenticity’ (another nineteenth-century invention) anti-traditional political theologies purged of the ‘impurities’ and ‘corruptions’ that actual tradition always brings with it. These purified, anti-traditional theologies are leavened with some of the least attractive ideas about modernity that Europeans developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of which is political antisemitism, usually along with anti-feminism and other related ideologies. Its adoption by some non-Europeans is a sign of their successful integration into a world system dominated by Europeans (and their descendants) and explained by Western ideas: imperialism inevitably shapes also the concepts and practices of those who try to fight back against it, for better or for worse. (‘The master’s tools’ are a rather mixed bag of stuff...) Current immigrants to Europe are as well able as anyone else to figure out, though, which of the many contradictory things and ideas that the dialectic of enlightenment and modern capitalism have produced, from brain surgery to the atom bomb, from multicultural society to the Holocaust, are emancipatory and useful, and which are not – unless European society denies them the breathing space to do so. If liberal society can defeat its own illiberalism, then enlightenment can still ‘master itself’ and ‘assume its own power’³⁴ and figure out how to get to ‘the better state of things ... where one can be different without fear’.³⁵

The fetish of ‘national self-determination’ plays a role for both issues that are at stake here: the occasional adoption of elements of antisemitism by people on the left, and their more than occasional failure to challenge

³² An article by aufheben (2009) provides detailed historical context on the continuities between ‘New Left’ Labour and ‘New Labour’, the importance of communitarianism for New Labour (and subsequently, the ‘New Tories’ under Cameron) and the emergence of the rather threadbare notion of a ‘British Muslim community’ in the 1990s.

³³ [The Guardian, 2017](#)

³⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 172

³⁵ Adorno 1978, #66

or even notice that antisemitism in others, especially when these others come from some far-away lands. A peculiar form of eurocentrism prevents some leftists to recognise antisemitism and other proto-fascist elements of the ideology of the Conservative Revolution, developed in Europe in the 1920s, when it emerges in the updated form given to it by non-Europeans, who use it to express their own resentment of liberal modernity. In this context, antisemitism comes into play, as if through the back door, as part of a strategy that defends ‘this’ particular culture. This is often articulated in terms of one of the world religions, against the imperialism of generic, overwhelming, ‘Western’, modern, liberal, capitalist, and relatively secular civilization. Antisemites denote the latter’s imperialism as ‘Jewish.’ Resistance to antisemitism depends on refuting the narrative of (particular) ‘culture’ versus (universal, imperial) ‘civilization’ and the coding of the corrosiveness of capitalist modernity as somehow specifically ‘Jewish’. Overcoming eurocentrism must include acknowledging that people from East, West, North, South all over the world have been equally able to study and adopt ultra-right-wing attacks *on* ‘the West’ that were first produced *in* ‘the West’: when some people, whatever their backgrounds, talk about the need to defend ‘their culture’ from unruly women, greed, the rule of money, homosexuals etc., and blame the liberal-capitalist modernity that brought about all these corruptions on ‘the Jews’, then it should be assumed that they might mean it exactly the way it sounds. It is not necessarily just a ‘cultural code’ for something else.

6. SAVING HUMANITY FROM ZIONIST MACHIAVILLAINS: THE *PROTOCOLS*

The various initial publications of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* tell different stories about their origins.³⁶ The 1917 publication of the *Protocols*, which seems to be the most influential one, links the *Protocols* to the First Zionist Congress that took place in 1897 in Basel. Since that year, also the year of the Balfour declaration that boosted the media presence of the Zionist movement, it is reasonable to assume that many readers of the *Protocols* connected the fictitious ‘Zionism’ of ‘the Elders of Zion’ to the *actual* movement of Zionism. Whoever in the period after WW2 is gullible enough to believe that the *Protocols* were produced or presented by Theodor Herzl in a secret backroom at the 1897 Basel Congress will also happily believe that the State of Israel plays an

³⁶ Sammons 1998

important part in the global Jewish conspiracy detailed in the *Protocols*. Given that the *Protocols* are today one of the most widely translated and distributed books in the world, it has to be assumed that at least some people's perceptions of Jews are influenced by this idea.³⁷

The Nazis, the most extreme students of the *Protocols*, took the not yet existent Zionist state to be a state that primarily serves to undermine other states, in particular Germany, if not the very concept of statehood as such. The classic statement of this notion is Alfred Rosenberg's 1922 pamphlet, *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus*, 'Zionism as the enemy of the state'.³⁸ By arguing that a potential 'Jewish state' would not be a genuine nation state, this early key text of National Socialist ideology makes a nationalist presupposition widely shared across all political divides: it is the task of any genuine nation state to protect the nation from, and regulate how it takes part in, the capitalist world system (whereas the Zionist anti-state is an agent of the world-system against the community of nations).

It wasn't only the Nazis who profoundly misunderstood the nature of the modern state. They share these false perceptions with all those who fail to comprehend that the modern state is constituted, and reconstituted continuously, by capitalist international society itself, whose political form the state system is: the modern state system and the capitalist world system

³⁷ There is a lot of literature on the distribution of the *Protocols*, foremost the two edited volumes by Webman (2011) and Landes and Katz (2012). I am not aware of any research on how readers *interpret*, and let themselves be influenced by what they read in the *Protocols*, in the vein of genuine *reception* research. As the *Protocols* are very tedious to read, entirely lacking the gothic pulp fiction readability that made the cemetery chapter from the novel *Biarritz*, the primary source of the *Protocols*, a bestseller in its day, one has to factor in that the enormous magnitude of the sales figures in countless languages does not necessarily mean millions of people in fact read more than probably the various prefaces of the *Protocols*. On the link between antisemitism, German National Socialism and antisemitic anti-Zionism, see Herf (2006) and, more reflective, Penslar (2006).

³⁸ As usual with Nazi pamphlets, the text does not quite deliver on its grandiloquent title: Rosenberg mostly develops a narrative of the Zionist movement of the time, with only a few passages suggesting that the Zionist state would never be a *bona fide* nation state. Rosenberg, like Hitler after him, shifts between two alternative and complementary views, one being that the Zionist state would be a headquarter serving the Jewish conquest of the world (i.e. a headquarter of globalization or hyper-imperialism, which is what the notion of 'the Jewish conspiracy' stands for) that would reinforce, rather than end the Jewish diaspora (Zionists do not assume all or most Jews of the world would actually move to Palestine); the second being that Jews are racially incapable of building a state in the first place, which is why the Zionist 'state' will never become a genuine state anyway. It is for these reasons that the Nazis were in the late 1930s able (for a brief period) to support (very limited) Jewish emigration to Palestine without thereby meaning to support the formation of a Jewish state.

are different dimensions of the same historical constellation.³⁹ The distinction between the system of nation states and the capitalist world system is merely a distinction within a dynamic totality, that is, a totality whose different constituents are mutually constitutive and obey the same dynamic force that governs everything within the constellation. For this reason, it is misleading, and politically a dead-end, to assume that the national state can be an instrument for ‘fighting back’ against the world system – it is an aspect of that system itself. One must avoid fetishizing the distinction between the individual state and the global system. This is very difficult because anyone who can perceive the obvious ugliness of global capitalism is susceptible to being mobilized, often in good faith, to defend the national state from the global-capitalist onslaught: the nation state speaks to its particular constituents as its nationals. This is a reality, easily taken at face value. Whoever accepts being addressed in this form, though, is potentially on a trajectory to succumb to the drift towards fascism, or at least will be ill-equipped to put up any effective resistance.

The strategy of turning the capitalist nation state into a rampart against capitalism, of making national community overcome capitalist society, is fundamentally and logically impossible, but its futility can be masked by making the effort ever more virile and martial. The strong believer in the nation’s ability to defend state and society from the ugly sides of capitalist modernity will be tempted to blame the inevitable failure of the project on the feebleness of milquetoast liberal-civic nationalism whose politics are not undergirded by cultural-ethnic-religious-racial claims of identity: failure will make the liberal-nationalist or social-democrat either retreat into the private world or turn to more robust and muscular, ultimately violent and paranoid nationalism – *et voilà*, fascism is only a step away.⁴⁰ ‘We are all in this together’ becomes *Volksgemeinschaft* when choppy seas and empty coffers demand clarification as to who belongs to the ‘we’ and who does not. Unfortunately, the muscular nationalists are realists in their delusion: one needed to be hopelessly idealistic to believe civic nationalism could on its own terms survive the fascist onslaught. The current situation, where most of the world is governed by authoritarian

³⁹ von Braunmuehl 1978; Bonefeld 1992; Song 2011.

⁴⁰ Postone suggests that the fascist cult of violence in fact mirrors a central aspect of the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production: ‘An irony involved in this “radical” stance, in the idea of violence as creative, cleansing, and revolutionary, is that it expresses and affirms a central characteristic of capitalism: its ceaseless revolutionizing of the world through waves of destruction that allow for creation, for further expansion. (Like the liberal notion of the rational actor, the existentialist and anarchist notions of the self-constitution of personhood through violence entail a projection onto the individual of that which characterizes corporate entities in capitalism.)’ (Postone 2006, 106).

nationalists and much of ‘the West’ by acolytes of Steve Bannon, suggests that liberals and democrats nowhere have the foggiest idea of how to defend themselves from the proto-fascist surge. Furthermore, where they are still in control of the state, they hold the rest of us hostage. As critical theorists suggested as early as the late 1920s, the authoritarian and nationalist Communist Party of the Weimar period was designed to fail as it had produced and reinforced an authoritarian personality structure in its members that prevented many from resisting fascism.⁴¹ The same is true of more or less any modern political party. In this perspective, the touchstone of whether any political movement or project today is worth supporting is whether it contributes to strengthening autonomous and anti-authoritarian individuals, that is, the types who are able to associate and cooperate without the imposition of heteronomous authority.

The Nazi readers of the *Protocols* believed that rootless Zionist cosmopolitans – the original ‘citizens from nowhere’ – cunningly planned to become rooted in a particular ‘somewhere’ in the form of a state-destroying state that would serve the global tyranny of money (which in their lexicon was Jewish). A Zionist state now exists; antisemites understand it in terms of Alfred Rosenberg’s reading of the *Protocols*. In the perspective of fascist antisemitism, the community of genuine, authentic, organic states can only take back control and regain sovereignty, defeat the uncanny abstract force that undermines their self-determination, by destroying the Jews. The Zionist headquarter, that state that is not really a state, is obviously a key target in this endeavour. One might have assumed that this idea cannot have much currency beyond the lunatic fringe of occult fascism, but tragically, it found an echo in the context of Stalinism after Stalin, where increasing demonization of a Zionist conspiracy seems to have served as ideological compensation for the increasing accommodation with ‘the West’ in the 1960s.⁴² Soft-peddalling Stalinists needed to sort out the acceptable from the evil aspects of ‘the West’ in the same way that earlier generations had distinguished good from bad capitalism, and the rumour about ‘the Jews’ was an obvious device to do this: one could find accommodation with gentile, but not with Jewish-imperialist capitalism. From the post-Stalin Soviet Union, it spread into a range of Stalinist-influenced nationalist ideologies in the contexts of the Cold War and post-WW2 decolonization and continues to inspire some of their successor ideologies, be they religious or secular.⁴³

⁴¹ Murphy 2018; Durkin 2018

⁴² Poliakov 1992, p. 89

⁴³ I am not qualified to form an opinion on whether Islamist ideology received its antisemitism from the quasi-Stalinist, authoritarian-nationalist ideologies (such as Pan-

7. ANTISEMITIC ANTI-ISRAEL PROPAGANDA IS NOT NEW

My personal interest in the matter of antisemitism goes back to a strange encounter that took place in 1987 when I lived in Hamburg. I had finished school but was not yet quite disillusioned enough with the world to become a university student, and I was involved in the ‘autonomist’ movement of the unemployed. I had visited a friend in London and had met there, through him, a Jewish Frenchman, a Trotskyist who had briefly lived in Israel, ostensibly in order not to be drafted to serve in Algeria, which he left subsequently in order not to be drafted into the Six Day War, and eventually ended up living in London. He had recommended to me two books on Zionism by an American civil rights activist, fellow Jewish Trotskyist and fierce critic of Zionism, Lenni Brenner’s *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (1983) and *The Iron Wall* (1984). On return to Hamburg I went to the bookshop Schwarzmkt, ‘Black Market’, a bookshop associated with the Hafenstraße squat which was near where I lived at that time. This was the go-to place for internationalist and anti-imperialist literature. Full of enthusiasm and ignorant of the finer points of the politics involved, I showed them the books and recommended to stock them. The gentleman who worked in the bookshop on that day looked at the books for two seconds and then replied: ‘why would we stock books on Zionism written by a Jew?’ I don’t think I had much of a reply to this statement at the time, but it certainly was a factor in my turn several years later to studying this kind of thing more seriously. It is also one of the reasons, on the other hand, that I am not that shocked by the instances of left-wing antisemitism currently discussed in the UK and elsewhere; they do not seem to me to constitute a phenomenon novel enough to be called ‘new antisemitism’: there is nothing *qualitatively* new about them, whereas *quantitatively* the matter is very difficult to assess.

Arabism or Baathism) that it destroyed and replaced, or from its own philosophical sources in the ‘Conservative Revolution’ and some of the latter’s fascist popularisers, or both. The methodological problem here is that a lot of the literature operates in a more naïve mode of ‘history of ideas’ without being able to trace in detail the *reception* of ideas. For example, there is a body of literature that assumes that the wartime Nazi activities of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem are the link between Nazi antisemitism and contemporary Islamist antisemitism. This is highly contentious, though, as it is far from clear what impact the Mufti, and Nazi propaganda in the Arab world in general, actually had, and how this may have influenced, however indirectly, actors operating today (see on this Wien 2010). My hunch is that the real-world practices of post-War authoritarian-nationalist parties contributed much more to the emergence and consolidation of fascist mentalities than the Mufti; religion becomes political only when political organisations make it so.

It is worthwhile to reflect on the fact that a West German anti-Zionist/anti-imperialist in 1987 *rejected* an anti-Zionist book because of its author's Jewishness, whereas more recently, and repeatedly, British anti-Zionists like Ken Livingston and Ken Loach *referenced* Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* to *support* their superficial and unhistorical opinions on Zionism, which contributed to their being accused of antisemitism. Many of Brenner's judgements and his use of sources are highly problematic,⁴⁴ but the current British anti-Zionist stupidities score much lower on the antisemitism-scale than the German anti-imperialist ones thirty-odd years ago.

The context in Hamburg in 1987/88 was the debate about the Hafenstraße 'Wandparole,' a mural at one of the squatted buildings in the harbour neighbourhood of St. Pauli that read 'Boycott "Israel"!/ Commodities, Beaches + Kibbuzim/ Palestine The People Will Liberate You/ Revolution Until Victory'. This mural with its strong undertones of ethnic nationalism was widely discussed at the time at a very high level of public involvement. It was noted widely that an *emancipatory* slogan in support of liberation would not have been addressed to a quasi-personified 'Palestine' but to the *population of Palestine* (a geographical term); even a half-way decent 'left-wing-nationalist' slogan would have stated that 'the people' – or rather, the *inhabitants* – of Palestine will liberate *themselves*, not a mystical subject/object called 'Palestine'. In an important intervention at the time, the social scientist and writer Jan Philip Reemtsma (1992) pointed out that the quotation marks around 'Israel' mirrored the custom by West German right-wing media still at the time to put 'GDR' into quotation marks in order to indicate the East German state's illegitimacy, and the intention to put an end to it. The rejection of the boycott relied back then on the same arguments as now, which were as valid then as they are now. Nothing new here at all.

Eric Hobsbawm remarked already in 1980 that a thirty-five year period of 'striking though not universal recession of anti-semitism,' some aspects of which were nothing less than 'amazing,' was about to end.⁴⁵ The reason, according to Hobsbawm, was that three of the four obvious reasons behind the recession of antisemitism were

⁴⁴ Brenner's book does not actually support Ken Livingston's claim made in 2016 that 'Hitler supported Zionism' in the way Livingston assumed it did (see *Bob from Brockley*). Livingston's false memory exemplifies, though, how Brenner's argument was *interpreted* at least by some of his readers. David Rosenberg (quoted in Watkinson 2016) referenced a meeting with Brenner in 1983 and judged the book 'a piece of tabloid journalism glued together with selective facts and lots of conjecture'.

⁴⁵ Hobsbawm 1987, p. 374

losing force: ‘the recoil effect of the holocaust’ that had stigmatized expression of ‘dislike and distrust of, or a contempt for, Jews’ (note: its *expression*, not the dislike itself) as it had been common amongst for example ‘English upper middle class people even of relatively liberal views’;⁴⁶ admiration of the military feats of Israel which showed that the Jews were not just a people of contemptible eggheads; thirdly, general prosperity had ‘blunted a good deal of the social and economic resentments which gave anti-semitism its cutting edge’. Another quarter-century on, these three factors of the ‘amazing’ post-Holocaust tendency of antisemitism to recede have continued to evaporate. A fourth factor named by Hobsbawm, namely that other immigrant minorities ‘became the main targets for racism’ so that ‘the firing line moved away’ from the Jews, a factor he saw as more persistent than the other three, is likewise clearly evidenced in the present.



Again, nothing new here at all. For Hobsbawm, the phenomenon that needed explanation in 1980 was the thirty-five-year relative *absence* of antisemitism, not its resurgence. More naïve liberals may have assumed

⁴⁶ Ibid.:375

the relative quiet was the signature of the progress of civilization. In fact, merely incidental factors had temporarily hidden the same old ugly flip-side of a civilization that has after (and in spite of) Auschwitz not changed any of its fundamental structures. What happened was exactly what for Adorno and others counted as the worst-case scenario: civilization resumed its day-to-day work where, in 1933, according to the liberal-democratic textbook, it had suddenly broken off. After the embarrassing interlude of National Socialism, business as usual was resumed. Therefore (once more Hobsbawm writing in 1980): ‘There is no reason to believe that the roots of xenophobia, racism in general, or anti-semitism in particular, have permanently atrophied anywhere’.⁴⁷ Some commentators suggest that antisemitism is now more common than in previous periods. Such a claim is difficult to assess: it seems problematic to make any judgement as to whether antisemitic *attitudes*, as opposed to the *manifestations* of such attitudes, have increased or decreased over a longer timescale.⁴⁸ It seems fair to say though that the polarisation of publicised *opinion* on such matters *has* increased; this is at least potentially a good thing. My own impression is that the space to discuss and challenge antisemitism on the left has hugely increased over the last decades, and thanks to the resurgence of genuine discussions of the Marxian critique of political economy (marketed under brand names such as ‘value critique’, ‘Open Marxism’ or ‘New Readings of Marx’) since the collapse of the double monarchy of Leninism and Social Democracy there are now far more individuals willing and able to do so.⁴⁹

8. ANTISEMITISM AND RIGHT/LEFT CONFUSION

Although the concept of ‘the left’ has, on the one hand, a rather stable core meaning in the reference to *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, it is, on the

⁴⁷ Hobsbawm 1987, p. 377

⁴⁸ Unfiltered access for just about anyone to electronic media that record, distribute and preserve in searchable form any opinion anyone may have on anything has only existed for a decade or so: it is quite plausible to assume that the media environment has multiplied the number of *manifestations* of antisemitic attitudes irrespective of whether these attitudes themselves have become more or less common. Methodological naivety also makes it appear that conservatives are less antisemitic than youthful progressives because the latter are wont to volunteer terabytes of evidence whereas the former do not typically share their innermost feelings and convictions with the digital commons.

⁴⁹ It is historically remarkable and very encouraging that sustained critiques of antisemitism are among the best-known texts within the canon of renewed, serious engagement with Marx, including those by Postone, who first published on the subject of antisemitism in 1979 (Postone 1980; 1985a and b; 1986; 1992 [1979]; 2003; 2006), and Bonefeld, who first stated his perspective in 1997 (Bonefeld 1997; 2005; 2014; 2020).

other hand, also very much a relational, floating concept: there can be ‘a left’ within pretty much any group or sub-category of people, as well as within society as a whole. The ‘Tory left’, the ‘Marxist left’, the ‘fascist left’ – all can be meaningful phrases. This polyvalence is made possible by the fact that different interpretations of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité* and how they relate, or should relate, to each other must result in different politics, usually prioritizing one or two elements of the revolutionary trinomial. The left-ness of ‘the Tory left’ is something quite different from the left-ness of ‘the Marxist left’: if the latter is the anti-Bolshevik, anti-authoritarian left that critiques or rejects the organisational form of the centralised party along with the capitalist mode of production and the modern bureaucratic state, consistent with the full trinomial of the values *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, the former seems almost exactly the opposite, namely advocacy of a more interventionist state that is meant to stabilize class hierarchy by improving the material situation of the lower orders. In nineteenth-century Germany, ‘left-liberal’ denoted a free-market, small-state liberal, whereas a more socially conservative national-liberal supporter of the monarchical, Bismarckian welfare state would have been perceived as more right-wing, similar to what in the UK is called a ‘One-Nation Tory’ (a phrase that seems to go back to Disraeli, the conservative modernizer). The ‘fascist left’ are those populist agitators who take literally the anti-capitalist pretensions of fascist ideology (the SA leader Ernst Röhm, the Strassers, today’s ‘third-positionist’ fascists, Casa Pound etc.): they are ‘fascists for more class equality’, as it were. Lipset named Peronism as the paradigm of left-wing fascism.⁵⁰

The notion of ‘the Labour left’, albeit widely used including in the context of antisemitism disputes, is particularly opaque. It seems to make little sense when left-ness is defined in terms of all three of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*: many of those considered to be on ‘the left’ of the Labour Party are associated with (supposedly progressive, ‘patriotic’) nationalism and nation-state-centric politics of redistribution that might score high in terms of *égalité* and *fraternité* (assuming these policies work) but low on *liberté*. It is surprising that a stronger commitment to statism counts in this context automatically as being ‘more left-wing’, not less. There is a (relatively small) anti-authoritarian tendency among ‘the Labour left’ but anti-authoritarianism – a socialist interpretation of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité* that would include anti-nationalism and anti-statism – does not define ‘the Labour left’ as a whole. In the context of social-democratic political parties, the definition of left-ness in terms of egalitarianism *alone*, as

⁵⁰ Lipset, 1960, pp. 133-4.

proposed by Norberto Bobbio (1996), seems more appropriate as it allows direct comparisons: politician A is ‘more left-wing’ than politician B because A is more strongly committed to state-mediated redistribution (scores high for *égalité* and *fraternité*) although B might perhaps be more strongly and explicitly opposed to clerical ultraconservatives and other Conservative Revolutionaries (scores high for *liberté*).⁵¹ The British discourse on antisemitism in the Labour party can therefore be addressed as a case of ‘antisemitism on the left’ only when the less complex definition of ‘the left’ is applied: it is about politicians who are concerned with egalitarian social reform rather than the *encompassing* revolutionary idea of emancipation in terms of the full trinomial of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.⁵²

⁵¹ This is unsurprising as Bobbio, the Weberian sociologist who proposed it, is himself a supporter of centre-left social democracy. The core of his argument (Bobbio 1996, pp. 66-71) is that the ‘camps’ of left and right consist ‘on the one hand, of people who believe that human beings are more equal than unequal, and on the other, people who believe that we are more unequal than equal’ (67), philosophically best represented by Rousseau and Nietzsche: ‘The same degeneration which created inequality for Rousseau created equality for Nietzsche’ (68); ‘the egalitarian condemns social inequality in the name of natural equality, and the anti-egalitarian condemns social equality in the name of natural inequality’ (68-9). In practice, the two camps assess differently ‘what is relevant to the justification or repudiation of discrimination’, producing arguments ‘for and against the proposal that characteristics belonging to individuals within the group under consideration’, such as women, ‘constitute grounds for equal treatment’ (69). ‘The egalitarian tends to play down the differences, the inegalitarian to overstate them’ (70). Importantly, Bobbio defines egalitarians rather strictly as ‘those who, while not ignoring the fact that people are both equal and unequal, believe that what they have in common has greater value in the formation of a good community’ (66-7): those who *deny* difference, or want to abolish it, are not egalitarians in the sense of Bobbio’s definition. Egalitarians simply say that certain (if not all) differences are irrelevant for the allocation of goods or rights. Therewith, Bobbio has (unintentionally) defined ‘left-wing antisemitism’ out of existence: since Bruno Bauer, the antisemitism of egalitarians and democrats was rooted in wanting to *dissolve and destroy* the difference of certain others that seemed to them obstacles to progress, against which Marx was the first to propose what Bobbio presupposes: to be indifferent to the difference. The Bruno Bauers are not egalitarians, pace Bobbio, i.e. not ‘on the left’. The problem is solved by way of definition (that is, through logocentrism) rather than dialectical historical analysis.

⁵² Bolton and Pitts (2018) demonstrate well the overlap between Corbynism and ‘Blue Labour’, which I would describe as a form of ‘lower case’, socially-minded conservatism. Outside London, ‘One Nation Toryism’ is now (December 2019) all the rage in the UK, especially as Prime Minister Johnson claims this label for himself. While a large section of the population seem to believe Johnson in fact will turn towards ‘One Nation’ conservative politics, others expect a continuation of Johnson’s Bannontite drift (for example [Peat, 2019](#)). As all those driven or removed from Johnson’s party confirm, there is not much this extreme form of neo-liberal authoritarianism wishes to ‘conserve’; its nationalism being of the ‘palingenetic’, re-birth variety (‘great again’; ‘taking back’

A good object to study right/left confusion is the 2012 mural 'Freedom of Humanity'⁵³ by the Californian new-age painter Mear One (Kalen Ockerman). The antisemitism of this painting is evidenced by the combination of the 'Eye of Providence' (identified by the artist himself as the symbol of the Illuminati) and the phrase 'The New World Order is the Enemy of Humanity' (included in the painting, a reference to the conspiracist idea that a 'New World Order', of which the 'Eye of Providence' is a symbol, is about to replace the system of sovereign nation states).⁵⁴ This is primarily a case of right-wing antisemitism, playing on the conspiratorial mindset expressed classically in the *Protocols*, pointing to 'the Jews' and the Illuminati as destroyers of the existing nation-state system. The image of the exploited and subjected who hold the table with their backs makes it equally likely to be endorsed by people who would describe themselves as 'left-wing', though. The mural fuses the crudely 'anti-capitalist' imagery of money-counting 'financiers' with the more modern political paranoia about the demise of the nation-state, two separate notions linked by the underlying, unspoken assumption that the nation-state can defend society from global financial capitalism. (Which it

etc.), it is not conservative but tends towards being 'revolutionary' in the original, literal (early-modern) meaning of the word – trying to make things 'revolve back' to their pristine or rightful state.

⁵³ Many pictures in the media show only a section of the mural. Good pictures are here: <http://hurryupharry.org/2012/10/05/i-was-wrong-about-the-mural/> and here: <https://architectsforsocialhousing.co.uk/2018/03/29/the-social-realism-of-the-labour-party-jeremy-corbyn-and-the-socialism-of-fools/>. Both blogs contain some useful comments and observations. This is the website of Mear One: <https://mearone.com/bio/>. He explains his position here: [Icke](#). On [his Facebook page](#) he wrote this: 'Everywhere I look I see the world becoming the science fiction reality I grew up reading about in books and watching on the screen. Greed runs rampant and now more than ever the capitalist elites who have caused suffering on mass scales throughout history for their own trillions in profit have an even stronger hand in orchestrating most all of the problems we face, namely war & poverty, and the destruction of humanity'. A more recent simplified version of the original painting, called 'False Profits' is for sale: <https://mearone.com/portfolio-item/false-profits/> and also available as a t-shirt: <https://store.mearone.com/collections/apparel/products/false-profits-tee>. The t-shirt carries an inscription saying 'All we gotta do is stand up and it's game over!' This suggests that Mear One believes that in capitalism, everybody is asleep and apathetic but once awakened could easily overthrow the exploitative system. Humanity is often represented in his paintings by a mother with infant, pointing to presumably rather conservative gender politics.

⁵⁴ On the phrase 'The New World Order', see *Berlet and Lyons 2000*, pp. 258-61 and chapter 14. On the notion of the conspiracy and the Illuminati, see *Rogalla von Bieberstein (1977; 2008)*. Some commentators also pointed to the big noses of several of the money-counting and monopoly-playing 'banksters' in the centre of the painting, although this is more open to interpretation.

cannot do because all over the world the nation-state is the political form, or mediation, of global capitalism, not something ontologically separate from, let alone opposed to it.)



The idea of a political conspiracy aiming at world government that uses capitalism as its tool, the central concern of the *Protocols*, was initially a concern of ultra-conservatives who understood capitalism as a modernizing force responsible for general societal corrosion, of which the labour movement is a symptom. In the contemporary context where ultra-conservatives are typically *defenders* of capitalism, *any* form of attack on capitalism has come to be seen as left-wing. The socialist left, not usually inclined to see itself as a symptom of capitalism, has thus inherited right-wing forms of anti-capitalism, and some have gladly accepted the gift. Conversely, nationalism (or rather, nation-building) had been predominantly a liberal and democratic issue in the nineteenth century, but has now become a shared concern almost universally across all ideological positions: the far-right notion that a ‘new world order’ (driven by Jews, Freemasons and/or Illuminati) is about to abolish all sovereign nation states is only the most paranoid expression of a much more widely shared nationalist fear of castration. The only inoculation against this meta-political crossover is Marxian dialectical modernism, the attempt to overcome capitalist modernity by way of closely hugging it.

Jeremy Corbyn,⁵⁵ whose failure to detect the antisemitism in Mear

⁵⁵ Jeremy Corbyn was the leader of the British Labour Party since 2015 and has, at the point of writing this article, announced his resignation for spring 2020. He represented the ‘Bennite’ tradition of democratic, Christian-inspired ‘ethical socialism’ and was in the

One's mural led to the 2018 scandal that augmented the painter's fame, was not often accused of having supported any antisemites *for their antisemitism*. The issue was rather that he either failed to notice occurrences of antisemitism within his own sphere of action, or perhaps thought of them as minor issues compared to what some of those whom he welcomed as his 'political friends' would have presented as their fight for cultural or national self-determination. And there's the rub: such self-determination, like 'sovereignty' an ideological hangover from the nineteenth century, remains a chief political value on 'the left', broadly conceived (i.e. including the liberal, democratic and socialist traditions). The defence of 'sovereignty' and 'national self-determination', concepts that receive whatever meaning they have only from the hierarchical structure of the world system itself, is in the present primarily invoked by the discourse of anti-imperialism. (The language of 'sovereignty' and 'national self-determination' is also used by groups within core countries against other core countries or supranational institutions, though, such as in the case of Brexit against the EU, or by Trumpism against the UN, WTO and others.)⁵⁶

During Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, liberal and conservative-leaning media consistently created the impression that antisemitism was specifically a problem on 'the left' within the Labour party, i.e. the left of the left. This seems unconvincing,⁵⁷ and in fact

media usually presented as radically left, or (falsely) as a Marxist. In a 2015 interview Corbyn debunked the idea of his being a Marxist: 'I haven't really read as much of Marx as I should have done. A bit but not that much. Marx's transition of history and the analysis of how you go from feudalism to capitalism and move on to a different [stage] is fascinating. We all owe something to it' (quoted in [Demianyk, Graeme, 26.7.2015](#)). Corbyn points here to the most positivistic, least Marxian aspects of traditional Marxism as the ones that impressed him most. His position on issues including social reform and imperialism/anti-imperialism seems consistent with the Labour party's roots in late-nineteenth century 'New Liberalism'. His use of the phrase 'we all' in the quoted passage was directed at the interviewer, the BBC's Andrew Marr. Corbyn's praise for Hobson's *Imperialism* (1902), a classic piece of the canon of New Liberalism, as 'a great tome' (Corbyn, Jeremy, 2011, 'Foreword', in Hobson, John A., *Imperialism: A Study*, Nottingham: Spokesman) is not scandalous as such, although his apparent ignorance of the often-discussed issue of Hobson's antisemitic remarks in this book speaks to a lack of intellectual curiosity. The latter is not an essential requirement for the position of British Prime Minister, though.

⁵⁶ Sometimes core-country adherents of the fetishism of 'sovereignty', such as British anti-EU campaigners, even borrow the language of 'national liberation', presumably without meaning to be sarcastic or to make fun of those who have been on the receiving end of British or broader European imperialism.

⁵⁷ There is really no way of quantifying such a claim, however. And in any case, the media's discussions do not usually make explicit what exactly they mean by 'the left'

underestimates the pervasiveness of the problem. One of the major Labour Party antisemitism scandals in 2016 concerned a Member of Parliament, Naz Shah, who had retweeted in 2014 a meme that suggested Israel should be relocated to the territory of the USA. Shah never belonged to the Labour Party's left wing.⁵⁸

Corbyn has regularly, and quite rightly, been vilified for his associations with reactionaries and antisemites. While this might be inconsistent with the more idealistic side of the Labour tradition, it is not inconsistent with the traditions of the British elite and the British state. The national state is by definition committed to 'the national interest', a phrase that denotes nothing if not the necessity and legitimacy of suspending one's political and moral values for pragmatic and instrumental reasons: being prepared to do so is surely part of the job description of Prime Minister.⁵⁹ The fact that a Labour politician downplays or ignores reactionary features of 'political friends' committed to shared anti-imperialism is a variation on the same theme: strategic geo-political commitments override more fundamental political-ethical values, as in the proverb, 'you cannot make

within the left. Sometimes it seems that observers presume an individual is 'on the left' simply due to not being white-Anglo-Saxon.

⁵⁸ The tweet is documented in House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2016. [*Antisemitism in the UK. Tenth Report of Session 2016–17*](#) published October 2016, page 38. The primary intended meaning of this meme is that the USA pay too much military aid to Israel and could save money by relocating Israel to somewhere in the USA. This is silly and tasteless but antisemitic only inasmuch as it presupposes that Israelis (or rather, Israeli Jews) can simply be shifted around by the USA, i.e. have no agency. The explicitly antisemitic element is in the list of slogans that sits underneath the visual element (the US map with Israel inserted): the bottom two of nine bullet points state, 'Middle East will again be peaceful without foreign interference' and 'Oil prices will go down, inflation will go down, whole world will be happy'. The antisemitism lies in the assumption that removal of 'the Jews' from Palestine would bring peace to the region (as well as the whole world), which identifies 'the Jews' with trouble and war and silently presupposes that everybody else in the region (and perhaps the world) is naturally peaceful. The fact that the meme is a joke does not mean that the statements are not meant to be understood as true, as the jocular dimension of many jokes refers to the form, not the manifest content of the joke. (As Ricky Gervais often says about his own provocative jokes: 'It is funny because it is true.') The predominant media discourse about this meme, though, typically failed to explain exactly what was antisemitic about the material. The BBC commentator Andrew Neil also added his own element of Holocaust trivialization when he equated the meme with support for the Eichmann plan to deport the German Jews to Madagascar (at the very end of the clip, [Daily Politics](#), April 27, 2016).

⁵⁹ In UK elections, the crucial test of exactly this quality of being prepared to commit the ultimate sin is the requirement to commit to 'pushing the button' of the nuclear 'deterrent'. It is a statement of valuing nation over morality, religious or otherwise.

an omelette without breaking eggs'.⁶⁰ Discussions of unsavoury associations with Islamists dogged also the Blair government when the Home Office as well as the Foreign Office (both led by Jack Straw successively) elevated individuals linked to the Muslim Council of Britain, an organization that originated in ultra-conservative Islamist networks, to being mediators between the British State and 'the Muslim community' as the supposed representatives of British Muslims. This led to a scandal in 2006.⁶¹ Furthermore, as much of the current debate on antisemitism 'on the left' plays out on the field of anti-Zionism, it is instructive to recall that the anti-Zionist 'language and ideas of today's pro-Palestine movement in Britain' gained mainstream recognition through the pioneering work of liberals much more than Marxists or Leninists: the presentation of the Palestine issue 'as a problem of human rights; dispossession of the Palestinians' homeland by racist colonialism; and an apartheid Israeli state standing in the way of justice' stems from a form of 'liberal anti-Zionism' that 'was kick-started by Young Liberal and Arab nationalist activists, funded by Arab governments', using 'the liberal language of anti-colonialism and human rights'.⁶²

Beyond more or less antisemitic expressions of anti-Israelism and other (casually, indirectly or overtly) antisemitic *discourse*, the most momentous case of a British mainstream party's *practical* association with antisemites was the switch of the Conservative Party under David Cameron from the mainstream-conservative European People's Party (EPP) to the far more right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the European Parliament that included, and still includes, straightforward antisemites.⁶³ This was an important step in the ongoing

⁶⁰ Arendt wrote very perceptively that such proverbs 'owe their general common-sense appeal to the fact that they represent ... some quintessence of Western philosophical thought' (Arendt 1994, p. 283), which in turn represents an aspect of what Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) describe as the self-destructive dynamic of a human civilization that wants to escape the logic of self-preservation by escalating the drive towards making ever more instruments of self-preservation. This comes down to saying that to prevent Auschwitz from repeating itself, we must stop breaking eggs. Arendt adds that we have come to a point where we are so busy breaking lots of eggs that we don't even bother making any omelettes. There are just broken eggs everywhere.

⁶¹ Bright 2006; Bhatt 2006. It seems that more recently, young British Muslims have begun to reclaim community representations like the MCB from fundamentalists (Jones 2019).

⁶² Rich 2018, page 98. Rich adds that specifically antisemitic elements such as the equation of Zionism with Nazism was first introduced in the British context by Maoists who seem to have been sponsored by Baathists, who in turn would have inherited this idea from Soviet Stalinism.

⁶³ Macintyre (2009)

rightward drift of the Conservative Party, also including the Brexit referendum and the escalating radicalization of the meaning of Brexit under May and Johnson, anticipated by the British nationalism and cultural conservatism predominant in the Labour Party when it was last in government.⁶⁴ When people ‘on the left’ side with right-wing and antisemitic forces whom they consider to be ‘the enemy’s enemies’, their behaviour is scandalous not by the standards of society at large but by the standards of the left itself.

9. ANTISEMITES AGAINST PEOPLE WITHOUT BORDERS

Antisemitism is selective and also rather flexible as to *which aspects* of the complex, contradictory phenomenon that is capitalist modernity it finds undesirable: greedy bankers, egoistic trade unionists, unruly women, anything cosmopolitan, gays, imperialists – all can be coded ‘Jewish’. All of these are historically connected – directly or indirectly – to the expansion of capitalist modernity in its liberal vein; they can therefore, in the mind of the antisemite, appear as so many different effects of the same Jewish machinations.⁶⁵

The shared ground that makes the meta-politics of antisemitism possible is characterized by the emphasis on community over class struggle, totality over fragmentation, defending identities over changing the world. There is no community in capitalist society, though, except the ‘societal community’⁶⁶ of the capitalist nation state. Antisemitism with its boundary-transcending and taboo-breaking mystique is the signature of those who aim to transcend partiality, fragmentation, particularity and division by exorcising the fragmenters. The fetishizing, dichotomising mind of the inhabitant of a world shaped by the fetishism of commodities splits up the bad reality of actual nationalism (evidenced by Israeli just as any other nation-state *realpolitik*) into two ideal-types. It is distilled ideologically into, on the one hand, the imaginary pure essence of true heroic patriotism (such as, say, that of ‘the Palestinians’, apparently a community without divisions of class, politics, gender etc.), and, on the

⁶⁴ [‘Brown stands by British jobs for British workers remark’](#); see also Shabi 2017; Squire 2015.

⁶⁵ It is worth noting that in the *Protocols* the Jews are supposed to promote liberal capitalism as well as social democracy only in the service of a global über-Bonapartist dictatorship: the former are merely strategic gambits. The antisemitic authors of the *Protocols* did not assume anyone, not even the Jews, would promote liberalism and/or socialism in good faith.

⁶⁶ Parsons 1966

other hand, oppressive, imperialist nationalism, epitomised in the evil scheming of the anti-nation that antisemites see in ‘the Jews’, and the imperialistic ‘entity’ of Israel. Such dualisms prevent any kind of political process and can only perpetuate the actual conflict.⁶⁷

In the current European context, direct associations between left-wing movements and far-right, anti-cosmopolitan ‘revolt against the modern world’ movements are fringe phenomena. Everything should be done to keep it that way. (Associations between mainstream conservatives and the far right are now commonplace, by contrast.)

The most prominent current context for antisemitism to materialize on the liberal and socialist left is that of supporting, or at least failing to oppose, ultra-conservative (and in terms of economic policy often neo-liberal) self-proclaimed resistance fighters against ‘westoxification’ in other parts of the world at the cost of abandoning the trade unionists, feminists, Marxists, Jews and gays whom they slaughter. Far from being radical, their metropolitan supporters are defectors who have abandoned the Enlightenment’s still largely undelivered promise of human emancipation.

Meanwhile, the spirit of the *Protocols* is in robust health. The man who killed eleven Jews in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in October 2018 thought that Jewish Machia-villains were secretly orchestrating Latino immigration, and that the defence of the American nation and the good kind of individualistic, God-fearing capitalism it embodies required killing Jews, *any* Jews. He may have assumed that the congregation of

⁶⁷ Postone warns against overestimating the relevance of local (geo-)politics and points instead to the more fundamental reality of socio-economic changes in the capitalist world system, arguing ‘that the spread of anti-Semitism and, relatedly, anti-Semitic forms of Islamicism [sic] (such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian offshoot, Hamas) ... may be sparked and exacerbated by Israel and Israeli policies, but its resonance is rooted in the relative decline of the Arab world against the background of the massive structural transformations associated with the transition from Fordism to neoliberal global capitalism. The result is a populist antihegemonic movement that is profoundly reactionary and dangerous’ (Postone 2006, 101-2). He suggests that the decline of the Fordist accumulation model, much more than the Israeli army, destroyed the viability of more traditional, relatively secular Arab state-centric nationalisms. A similar point (and with further useful references) is made by Cooper who writes that ‘a comparative historical view reveals a remarkable synchronicity to the worldwide resurgence of religion, even across the most intransigent geopolitical and doctrinal divides. In contexts as diverse and inimical as the United States, Egypt, and Iran, the return of political religion during the 1970s can be correlated with dramatic shifts in the gender, class, and ethnic composition of work, as the Fordist-developmental consensus around (masculine) formal, industrial labor succumbed to the flexible restructurings of post-Fordism’ (2013, 35).

Squirrel Hill was actively involved in organizing the evil caravan of violent Latinos, craftily enhancing their dangerousness through an admixture of Middle Eastern terrorists whom a hidden hand had spirited to Honduras. He must have been convinced that these destitute Catholics would not have made it anywhere near the US border without the support of the suspiciously Jewish-sounding charity *Pueblo sin Fronteras* – in this fascist's mind, surely lawyers from nowhere financed by George Soros.

Strictly speaking, genuinely 'left-wing antisemitism' is the one that tars 'the Jews' with the brush of being enemies of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It needs to be distinguished from the phenomenon that people 'on the left' can have some rather conservative attitudes and opinions, including elements of right-wing antisemitism such as the 'capitalist-modernity-as-conspiracy' myth. In fact, some ideas that in common parlance count as 'left-wing' (such as the idea that it is the role of the state to alleviate social inequality) are historically speaking conservative, which may help explain why some on 'the left' are sympathetic, or indifferent, to explicitly conservative or ultra-conservative positions. More importantly, though, a further distinction must be made between the more mainstream forms of right-wing or left-wing antisemitism and the decidedly metapolitical form of eliminatory, violent antisemitism that is driven by a 'conservative-revolutionary' mindset that transcends the ordinary distinction between 'the left' and 'the right.'

Key to making these theoretical distinctions between the three principal forms of antisemitism is the concept of the peculiar dialectic between modern, capitalist civilization and the hope for emancipation that is central to Marxian theory. (It also informs the Marxist debate on imperialism, i.e. the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production, and the role states and their militaries play within it). The fact that much of the debate on 'left-wing antisemitism' takes place in the context of debates on Israel/Palestine can be related to this. Israel/Palestine is not only prominently a postcolonial space but also an area – a mental space as well as, to a lesser extent, an actual one – where differing conceptions of capitalist modernity and modern statehood collide. Outside observers may project latent antisemitic ideology onto the conflict in Israel/Palestine that would not impact their analysis of any other similar conflict: those in 'the West' brought up in a Christian-ish environment must take into account the possibility that their judgement may be influenced by the 'morality play' dimension emanating from this particular state's Jewishness: the actual 'Jewish state' may well trigger subconsciously held imaginings of heartless 'Jewish modernity' and greedy 'Jewish capitalism' that must conflict with the warm-as-blood, community-minded, non-greedy, hard-

working capitalism of genuine, ‘organic’ nations. The parable of ‘Jesus driving the money-changers and merchants out of the Temple’, a week after which he was dead, operates in the deep tissue of our civilization, and we better keep an eye on how it plays games on our minds.

By far most instances of what is commonly perceived to be ‘antisemitic anti-capitalism’ is not anti-capitalism at all, but rather the antisemitic version of the conservative-reformist search for a way of politically *framing* capitalism that does not threaten pre-existing societal hierarchies of power, including those of nation, race, caste, creed, sex and sexuality. Most antisemites, including ‘left-wing’ ones, want capitalism minus its ‘anomic’ or, as Comte might have put it, ‘critical’ dimensions, that is, capitalism minus its negative, identity-destroying effects. Marx and Engels, by contrast, thought the latter were the real basis of our hope to *transcend* the misery of our civilization. Anti-capitalism must accentuate the negative in order to fly by the nets of antisemitism. One hundred seventy years after the *Manifesto*, capitalism’s corrosiveness remains ours to embrace.

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Fascism, Anti-Semitism, and the Roots of Oregon's White Power Movement

Shane Burley and Alexander Reid Ross¹

Conducted through archival research of primary documents including period newspaper articles, meeting notes, and political pamphlets at the Oregon Historical Society, this article investigates the development of inter-war fascism in Oregon as a key inflection point in the germination of the modern white power movement. Contrasting the novel organization and dissemination of inter-war fascism in Oregon with the earlier rise of the Ku Klux Klan, this research illustrates the influences of European ideological currents on the domestic far right as it attempted to consolidate dispersed networks of ethnic interest groups and political leaders into a radical force for change. We track the successes and failures of the fascist movement as its followers integrated within the ranks of law enforcement and public officials, and the impact of the Second World War on their ensuing, conflictive relationship with the federal government. Our findings indicate that the inter-war fascist movement in Oregon saw the broadening of U.S. "Americanism" to include Catholics and immigrants while simultaneously seeing its numbers dwindle. This emergence of a more inclusive sense of whiteness, combined with resentment against the

¹ This article is an extended study based on an earlier paper the authors published. Shane Burley, and Alexander Reid Ross. "From Nativism to White Power: Mid-Twentieth-Century White Supremacist Movements in Oregon." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (2019): 564-87. Accessed February 11, 2020. doi:10.5403/oregonhistq.120.4.0564. A substantial portion of that text has been reprinted here.

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federal government following the Second World War, produced new conceptualizations of “white nationalism” and “white power” as revolutionary slogans far removed from the politically-powerful, populist mass movement that the Klan created in the 1920s. However, we argue that political marginalization of rural areas by the left only reifies the popularization of the far-right Patriot movement as an “outsider force,” normalizing fascist ideology in the process. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS: Sliver Legion, German-American Bund, Nativism, White Power, Oregon, Posse Comitatus, Fascism.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan penetrated many aspects of Oregon’s social and political life, but the Klan’s influence here as well as elsewhere rapidly declined in the middle of that decade. The kind of right-wing politics that it perpetuated did not completely disappear, however, as new fascist and racist organizations gained a foothold in the Pacific Northwest during the 1930s and after. These organizations moved away from the “100 percent Americanism” of the Klan, embracing the racialist politics of foreign nations, predominantly Nazi Germany. Though these organizations were much smaller and less influential than the Klan had been, they are worthy of historical attention because they had elements of state support, especially in their vehement opposition to communist influence, and they would provide some of the mythology, the origin stories, that would not only reaffirm white supremacy, but also root their organizations firmly in the land and in religious history.

That Oregon was a center of Klan influence is a well-known story. Rising to influence in the years after World War One, the KKK was a white nationalist organization that primarily sought to limit the influence of Jews and Catholics and to curtail immigration. In 1922, it was the critical force that helped to defeat incumbent Republican Benjamin Olcott and to place Democrat Walter Pierce in the Oregon governor’s mansion. At the same time, Klan power among the electorate resulted in the passage of the Compulsory Public School Act that aimed to force all students into the public schools, a “100 percent Americanist” effort to curtail priestly control over Catholic children. In the next legislative session, Klan

legislators led the way in passing the Alien Land Act of 1923 that prevented Japanese and other “aliens” who could not become naturalized from owning land in the state. The Klan was an expression of white supremacy—its mention of nonwhites was always cast in terms of subservience—of Protestant nationalism, of Victorian morality, and perhaps of a fascist understanding of the people and the state.²

The Klan’s direct influence was brief—scandals, especially involving the sexual assault by a Klan leader in Indiana, aided its downfall—only to be supplanted by smaller fringe organizations that would rise up in the wake of Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany in 1933. Active cells of the Friends of New Germany—later to be supplanted by the German-American Bund—and the Silver Shirts, were inspired by the rise of fascist militarism in Germany and Italy. Devoted to white supremacy, these organizations were less imbued with Protestant nationalism, evidenced by their willingness to enroll Catholics in the cause. Thoroughly antisemitic, these fascist fringe groups focused on Jewish influence in banking and in the Roosevelt administration, and this led them in directions less emphasized by the Klan. Leaders of these organizations worked with right-wing extremists among Native Americans like Elwood Towner, who were disenchanted with New Deal changes in Indian policy, and some of them, like William Dudley Pelley, could express themselves within the terms of spiritualism and esoteric religion. In these years, mythologies were fluid, as members and leaders of organizations borrowed from earlier lines of

² Works on the Klan in Oregon are plentiful. They include Eckard Toy, “The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon,” in G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 270; Toy, “Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon, during the 1920s,” in Shawn Lay, *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 156; David A. Horowitz, “Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance: The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon,” in Lay, *The Invisible Empire in the West*, 209; Horowitz, “The Klansman as Outsider: Ethnocultural Solidarity and Antielitism in the Oregon Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80 (January 1989): 12-20; and Paul M. Holsinger, “The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925,” *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (August 1968): 327-341. Also useful is the chapter on the Klan in Robert D. Johnston’s, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 223-247.

thought, all of which rejected the rationalist logic of modernizing society. Though their numbers remained small, these organizations provided a crucial link in the development of the radical right of the post-war era.³

These fascist groups relied on a *herrenvolk* sense of fairness that resonated with contemporary “progressive” discourse about social progress and community control; they could sound “populistic.” But ethnicity was the key category: the leadership of these organizations repeatedly asserted that the rise of the New Deal state amounted to a consolidation of a Jewish-dominated ruling class that was responsible for the impoverishment of common people (though their rhetorical anger was mounted not only against elites but also marginalized groups and unions).⁴ Roger Griffin emphasizes the mythic constructions that such organizations applied to their historical role; for him fascism is defined by “palingenetic ultranationalism,” which assumes the necessity of national rebirth to reclaim a mythically pure past.⁵ Fascism can then be defined as a mass movement to “reclaim” a type of society rooted in traditionalism, hierarchy, and militarism, and centered on an intense sense of identity for a particular people. In the interwar period, these fascist movements emerged in Oregon as a part of a larger European political movement, influenced by rise of fascism in Germany and Italy and taking ideological inspiration from those successful examples.

The primary identity expressed throughout much of the rise of fascist movements in Europe and North America, particularly during the interwar period, was racial. White supremacy can be defined as a set of ideological or institutional precepts attributing superiority of the white race over non-white races. This can be expressed in a variety of ways, including institutional inequality favoring whites or a conscious ideology arguing in favor of this racial hierarchy.⁶ This combination of discursive right-wing populism and the emphasis on mythic origins characterizes the rise of the

³ The literature on fascist organization in Oregon is much less extensive than that on the Klan, reflecting the smaller size of the movement. See Eckard Toy, “Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies, and Personalities in the 1930s,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80 (October 1989): 139-146.

⁴ Cas Mudde defines populism as a movement that sees two groups in antagonism with each other, a corrupt elite and the people. *The Far Right in America* (NY: Routledge, 2018), 3-4. Also see Martin Durham, *White Rage: The Extreme Right and American Politics* (NY: Routledge, 2007), 8.

⁵ Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 40-45; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 34-40.

⁶ George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi.

extreme right in the aftermath of the Klan and the white supremacist ideology it was rooted in.

After the Ku Klux Klan's decline in the late 1920s, Oregon white supremacists scattered into much smaller rival organizations, attempting to regain their former influence. The Klan tried to resuscitate its organization, dubiously claiming 17,000 members by the late thirties.⁷ Fred Gifford, the former Grand Dragon of the Klan, helped to form the National Crusaders, while former Klan newspaper editor Lem Dever joined with Roy Metcalf in the National Brotherhood. In the power struggles that ensued, the formerly fraternal Klansmen accused one another of being spies for the "Jewish committee."⁸ More vital organization would depend on foreign developments, particularly the 1933 rise of Adolph Hitler to power in Germany, which would provide the inspiration necessary to consolidate white supremacists into fascist organizations in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

A few of these organizations were comprised of German immigrants, many of whom had immigrated after the Treaty of Versailles assigned Germany financial and political accountability for the carnage of World War I, and many of them held disdain for the liberal-leaning Weimar Republic. In the United States, they experienced hostility lingering from the war, and this helped produce a sense of radical political alienation through which latent antisemitic sentiments could be expressed. Anti-Weimar organizations were established in the 1920s, such as the Teutonia Association (Nationalsozialistische Vereinigung Teutonia), which existed from 1923 to 1932. After the fall of the Weimar government, it was succeeded by the Friends of New Germany (Bund der Freunde des Neuen Deutschland) and then by the German-American Bund (Amerika-Deutscher Volksbund). These organizations required German language skills and members needed to guarantee that they possessed Aryan racial pedigrees.⁹

The Portland chapter of the Friends of New Germany came under the influence of Adam Hochscheid who became president of the chapter in 1933.¹⁰ A virulent anti-Semite, Hochscheid edited the popular German language newspaper, the *Nachrichten*, which he now used to defend the Nazi regime. Some of its efforts were commercial, as it fought a boycott

⁷ "Hooded Klan Meets," *Portland News-Telegram*, November 25, 1937.

⁸ Report on far right, Early November 1933, George Rennar Collection, MSS 2918, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁹ Roberta Lee Schmalenberger. 1983. "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918." Dissertations and Theses. Paper 3430; 63.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of German businesses and warned its readers “that lies were [being] spread about Germany.” The *Nachrichten* provided its readers lists of Friends of New Germany-endorsed businesses. In 1935, members of the Friends of New Germany began handing out an American National Party flyer that listed the crimes they attributed to Jews, and encouraged supporters to “Buy Gentile! Employ Gentile! Vote Gentile!” Soon after, Hochscheid stepped down from his position as president to focus on the *Nachrichten*, but the group was already in decline.¹¹

After the United States government declared the Friends of New Germany to be an extension of the German Nazi Party, the organization dissolved, only to be replaced by the German-American Bund. It grew slowly. Within a year of its establishment in 1936, the German-American Bund claimed only ninety Portland members. However, it sought to make itself relevant through extravagant regalia and performance, as uniformed Bund members entered Portland’s halls saluting before a portrait of George Washington, whose legacy the Bund leadership appropriated—particularly as it pertained to warnings against foreign entanglements.¹² The Bund’s relevance would lie in its willingness to put aside ethnic grievance and to develop overlapping membership, building bridges with other far right and ethnic communities that came together around anti-Semitic narratives.

The rise of the Nazi party in Germany also led to a native-born fascist response, inspiring William Dudley Pelley, a former screenwriter who had left his Hollywood life behind after a night vision had led him down the road of spiritualism and esoteric religion. With the rise of Hitler, Pelley’s idiosyncratic Christian ideology increasingly incorporated intense antisemitism and Nazi affinities, and he incorporated these into the Silver Legion, more commonly known as the Silver Shirts. Openly pro-Nazi, the Silver Legion soon boasted a membership of 400 in Oregon.¹³ Meetings

¹¹ Schmalenberger, “The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918,” 63; “Record of Sworn Statement made by Otto F. Decker,” U. S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Portland Oregon File No. 235-4093; “Where do YOU Buy?” Portland: A. E. Kern & Company, 1-3 George E. Rennar Papers.

¹² Police Informant Report on German-American bund. “Report: Activities of Portland branch German American Bund [mid-1938],” George E. Rennar Papers; Anna Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013), 189.

¹³ A Portland observer commented that in 1933 “one of the local Italian societies joined *en masse*.” On Pelley, see Suzanne G. Ledboer, “The Man who would be Hitler: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion,” *California History* 65 (June 1986): 127-136; Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in right-Wing Extremism and the Occult* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press), 63-71, 80-90. Also useful is Eckard V. Toy, “Silver Shirts in the Northwest.”

of the Silver Shirts included lengthy speeches by white supremacists, Klansmen, and regional organizers like Roy Zachary, a Seattle restaurateur who helped shape the Washington-based Christian Party as the political wing of the movement. Speakers addressed the destructive nature of the Federal Reserve System and its monetary policy, which they connected to Jewish influence, while others stressed the need to liberate “Aryan” men from the evils of Jewish Communism. On August 15, 1936, Pelley gave a speech in Portland, which according to the *Oregon Liberal*, a weekly broadsheet edited by former Klansman Lem Devers, was attended by some 500 Silver Shirts.¹⁴

The Silver Legion remained active through the 1930s, chapters appearing in The Dalles, Bend, Medford, Toledo, and St. Helens. By 1939, the Silver Shirts boasted 125 neighborhood councils in Portland with between six and twenty members each, as well as several councils across the Columbia River in neighboring Vancouver, Washington.¹⁵ In that year, between 250 and 300 people came to an event in Portland to hear Roy Zachary engage in extremist rhetoric. “Every red blooded American citizen should have a good gun and ammunition,” Zachary told an enraptured crowd. “Put up a target and have your wife practice shooting it if you want to keep a free government.”¹⁶ Increasingly, the far right saw the state as captured by foreign, particularly Jewish interests, labeling Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “President Rosenfeld.” This paranoid idea would later crystalize in the post-war period with the far right’s portrayal of the U.S. government as explicitly the project of Zionist Jews, whom they believed were capturing political and economic systems through the Federal Reserve to exact their control.¹⁷ As a corollary to their antisemitism, the Silver Shirt’s narrative embraced American populist discourse that stressed vaguely defined “elites” who lacked loyalty to the hard-working white working class.

Similar messaging was produced by the Bund, which also tried to implant the narrative of the “vast Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy,” declaring that their main purpose, and that of Nazi Germany, was to fight the scourge of Communism, which threatened the destruction of America.¹⁸ Thus, a

¹⁴ “Portland Jews in Danger of Losing Many Friends,” *Oregon Liberal*, 1:18, September 11, 1936, pg. 1

¹⁵ Silver Shirts Meeting Report, February 10, 1939, George E. Rennar Papers.

¹⁶ Silver Shirts Meeting Report, June 16, 1939, George E. Rennar Papers.

¹⁷ George Michael, *Willis Carto and the American Far Right* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 106.

¹⁸ Leland V. Bell, “The Failure of Nazism in America: The German American Bund, 1936-1941.” *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (1970): 587.

group comprised of recent immigrants from Germany could join a nativist movement by embracing a distorted understanding of the United States as a nationalist entity that required white immigrants to protect it from subversion by Jewish cabals. Jewishness, foreignness, the elites, and the communists became interlocking and virtually synonymous components of the same conceptual model of this burgeoning fascist movement, as whiteness effectively became the sole criteria for entrance into the national community.

Whereas the Roosevelt administration monitored them for dangerous activities, portions of local government sometimes found them useful, particularly as a counterforce to Communist influence. The Portland Police Bureau integrated the Silver Shirts into their broad efforts to quash communist influence, particularly among organized labor. Formed in the 1910s to keep labor unions in check, the Bureau's secretive "Red Squad" faced mounting pressure in civil society beginning in 1937.¹⁹ The Red Squad produced a series of five-page reports that detailed different groups, unions, organizers, and teachers harboring "red" sympathies. By August 1937, the Red Squad's leader, Captain Walter Odale, had joined a new and secretive Silver Shirts spin-off called the American Defenders.²⁰ According to meeting notes, the American Defenders received support from a man named "Kemp"—likely Wilford Kemp, a San Diego millionaire who was Pelley's running mate on the Christian Party ticket in 1936, the political arm of the Silver Legion. In turn, the American Defenders contributed \$100 toward printing Pelley's propaganda and made plans for a "Committee of One Thousand" to serve as a vigilante organization.

Amid mounting pressure, on October 1, 1937, Odale, who called Portland "the third largest center of Nazi activity in the United States," concluded the Red Squad "Weekly Report of Communist Activities" by associating fascist organizations with anti-Communism. He asserted, "It can be safely said, that if it were not for the Communist Party, there would be no Fascist or Nazi scare."²¹ It would prove the final Red Squad report, as controversy mounted after the *Oregonian* revealed on October 26, 1937, that the Police Bureau's "Red Squad" and school district board director Louis E. Starr had interrogated a student union leader at Lincoln High

¹⁹ See W.K. Patrick, "New Social Order," In "Views on All Sides of Current Topics," *Oregonian*, May 24, 1937.

²⁰ Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, Sept. 17th, 1937, George E. Rennar Papers.

²¹ Walter Odale. Weekly Report of Communist Activities. Bureau of Police, Portland, Oregon. October 1, 1937, George E. Rennar Papers.

School.²² About a month later, a busy meeting of American Defenders decided that the “work and records” of Odale’s Red Squad “will be taken over by a new [private] organization, Americans Incorporated.”²³

The first issue of Americans Incorporated’s *Radical Activities Bulletin* came out ten days later, picking up where the Red Squad left off. With lengthy articles on the activities of the CIO organizing timber workers and the Portland School Board, the *Radical Activities Bulletin* kept tabs on the left and campaigned for the right. It reported that “one Legion post” in Milton-Freewater, “sent in a [anti-union] petition in less than three hour’s time.”²⁴ The organization looked abroad as well, condemning leftist support for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War as pro-Soviet and anarchistic, while it denounced a Chinese picket against a pig iron plant sending munitions to the genocidal Japanese Empire as “anti-anti-communist.”²⁵ As the Anti-Defamation League’s David Robinson noted, the organization attracted “certain fascist individuals who saw an opportunity to ride their hobby under the guide of fighting communism.” Police captain Walter Odale was on the board of directors, and Louis Starr headed up the organization, with other key members being prominent police officers and businessmen.²⁶ Despite the revelation that the German government considered Americans Incorporated a friend of the Third Reich, former governor Charles H. Martin, who had in 1935 put the state’s resources at the disposal of timber companies fighting a strike, now was willing to be the public honorary chairman of an Americans Incorporated rally against Communism.²⁷

Small as they were, the various organizations developed an ecumenical cultural apparatus, including meeting places, that allowed for the spread of ideas and personnel. The American Defenders, Bund, and Silver Shirts met in houses, cafes, and in Portland’s Turnverein Hall, run by pro-Nazi activist Otto Uhle, as well as the Norse Hall, Woodman Hall, and the Redman Hall, which was associated with a fetishized notion of Native American culture. In early 1938, an effort was made by the American

²² “‘Red Squad’ Head Quizzes Student,” *Oregonian*, October 26, 1937.

²³ American Defenders Meeting Report, December 4, 1937, George E. Rennar Papers.

²⁴ It is unclear whether “Legion” here describes the American Legion or the Silver Legion; however the former is more likely. *Radical Activities Bulletin*, Americans Incorporated. Portland, Oregon. No. 14, March 11, 1938.

²⁵ *Radical Activities Bulletin*, Americans Incorporated. Portland, Oregon. No. 14, March 11, 1938.

²⁶ David Robinson, Preliminary Organization Report, October 17, 1941, George E. Rennar Papers.

²⁷ See “Fascist Party,” *Portland Voter*, July 30, 1938; “Nazi Organization in United States” *Salem Capital Press*, April 7, 1939;

Defenders to unite the right as they announced the emergence of an “Americanization Council,” joining twenty-one far-right “patriotic organizations” throughout Portland, including “the German Folksbund and the K.K.K.”²⁸ Many of the groups listed were relatively small, and there is little evidence that the Americanization Council ever coalesced.

The use of Redman Hall as a meeting place provides a link to a timeless white “celebration” of indigenous cultures, to which they often ascribed indigenous “anti-modern” cultural modalities that borrowed from other forms of colonialist ideologies such as Orientalism, the Western re-interpretation of Eastern religions through an inaccurate and racist framework.

And it could be easily appropriated for extremist ends; indeed, the fetishization of indigeneity and the representation of an archetypal human community lay at the roots of the fascist desire for a rebirth of their own mythical, ancestral community, whether Nordic or Italian or “100% American.”²⁹

Among the Bund's allies was the eccentric Portland attorney Elwood A. Towner, a member of the Siletz nation who had attended the Indian school at Chemawa. Calling himself “Chief Red Cloud,” Towner regularly attended both Silver Legion and Bund meetings, a matter that was facilitated by the German Government’s determination that Indians were a part of the Aryan race.³⁰ Towner’s chief grievance was against the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, or Wheeler-Howard Act, which he denounced as “Jewish communism pure and simple.”³¹ Towner contributed to the rise of fascist rhetoric and ideology by asserting, “This country and the government was built on Indian philosophy and Christianity and the time is coming when Indians and all Christian people will be united in one cause against Jewish communism and all the other isms of Satan.”³²

The Warm Springs tribe of Central Oregon went to special lengths to

²⁸ American Defenders Meeting Report, January 8, 1938, George Rennar Papers. Fred Gifford had revived the Klan in 1937, claiming that the primary focus was to fight both “communism and fascism in this country” and to keep the U.S. “safe for the democratic principles that made it great.” “Klan Revival Due in Oregon, Gifford Says,” *Oregon Journal*, October 19, 1937.

²⁹ Roger Griffin. “The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 21-43.

³⁰ Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2018), 59-60; Vine Deloria and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 180

³¹ Letter to John Bird Earrings December 27th, 1938, George E. Rennar Papers.

³² *Ibid.*

state that Towner did not speak for them.³³ Law enforcement officials attempted to discredit him, one informant alleging that Towner had a wife and 13-year-old son living on the Umatilla reservation, both sick with syphilis.³⁴ His previous wife, Maude Craig Hayes, told investigators that he worked directly with the Silver Legion and “kept her as a prisoner in Portland with bodyguards so that she could not escape.” Although white people often cherished Towner’s contributions, she stated, he had no support from the indigenous community.³⁵

That was probably an overstatement. Towner worked with the American Indian Federation, which Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle describe as providing the “most vocal” of Native American opposition to the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which had been proposed by John Collier, Roosevelt’s head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The New Deal policy attempted to revive tribal self-government and put a value on Native American culture, but its turnabout from the individualistic emphasis of the Dawes Act created dissension on some reservations, most famously among the Navajo.³⁶ The American Indian Federation consistently attacked the Indian Reorganization Act as communistic and anti-Christian, and for that reason anti-New Deal opponents of the IRA were happy to provide them a forum to criticize Collier and Roosevelt at Congressional hearings. Towner took this tendency of the organization and transformed it into antisemitism, denouncing Collier as a “Jew-loving Pink Red,” and accusing Roosevelt of being a secret Jew.³⁷ It is not surprising that he would have been welcomed in the white supremacist circles of the Bund and Silver Shirts in the Northwest.

More central to the intensification of antisemitism and to the rise of the postwar religious extreme right was the eccentric body of thought known as British-Israelism, which asserted that Anglo-Saxons were the true genetic descendants of Biblical Hebrews and that the Jews in their midst were either Khazar “Asiatics,” or had their origins in a rebellion against the divine commandment not to intermarry with “Edomites.” In either case, the genetic bearers of the divine covenant, a chosen people, were Anglo-Saxon and not Jewish. The ideas as they were formulated in the late

³³ “Warm Springs Tribe Repudiates Towner,” *Morning Oregonian*, March 20, 1939.

³⁴ Informant Report on Towner, May 11, 1939, George E. Rennar Papers.

³⁵ Police Informant Letter About Elwood Towner, May 27, 1939, George E. Rennar Papers.

³⁶ On the complex sources of the Navajo conflict with Collier, see Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 212-314.

³⁷ Deloria and Lytle, *The Nations Within*, 180.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries supported a sense of Anglo-American mission in the world and subsequently they would become one of the most important foundational sources of the racist Christian Identity religion, which would move beyond the genetic arguments proffered by the proponents of British-Israelism to argue that Jews were the spawn of Satan. William Cameron, who had edited the *Dearborn Independent* in the 1920s while it was still publishing its series on the menace of “The International Jew,” would serve as the organization’s president in the 1930s, providing a strong link between the movement and antisemitism. In the 1930s, Cameron would lecture on the Bible as a “racial book,” which told the story of the Anglo-Saxon race.³⁸

The connections with fascist white supremacy run deep in Oregon. The leading lecturer for the Ku Klux Klan, Reuben Sawyer, had lectured on British-Israel principles while serving as a pastor at Portland’s Eastside Christian Church in the years prior to the rise of the Klan, and had played an active role in the formation of the British-Israel World Federation in 1919 and 1920, helping to draft the organization’s constitution and attending its first congress in 1920 in London, a matter covered by the *Oregonian*. On tying his fortunes to the Klan, Sawyer assumed that it would serve the interests of the British-Israel movement—a mistake that proved divisive within the B-I community and particularly with A. A. Beauchamp, the Boston-based editor of the *Watchman of Israel* who found the viciousness of Klan antisemitism and racism distasteful. Nonetheless, Sawyer remained active in British-Israel circles after his affiliation with the Klan came to an end in 1924. In the 1930s, leadership of the organization would pass into new hands.³⁹ It was during this period that B-I made the shifts necessary to degenerate further into the later Christian Identity movement, which we will discuss later in this article.⁴⁰

In the 1930s, British-Israel gospel became one of the mythic origin stories that were told amongst the gatherings of the fascist right, and spread throughout the network of organizations that appeared in Oregon in the 1930s. Speakers like Fred Johnson, the president of the Oregon branch of the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, a British-Israel organization, found eager audiences in the halls open to the fascists. In the halls as well

³⁸ Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*, revised edition (UNC Press, 1997), 22-26 and 31-40.

³⁹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 22-26; Lawrence M. Lipin, “Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump: True Believers and Fellow Travelers,” Common Knowledge, Pacific University, <https://commons.pacificu.edu/ashist/1/>.

⁴⁰ Martin Durham, *White Rage: The extreme right and American politics* (New York, Routledge, 2007), 67.

on radio, Johnson spoke on themes that had tied the right together since the heyday of the Klan, including “Masonic History,” “Pyramid Symbolism” (a particular obsession of William Pelley’s), “Racial Origins,” and “Israel Truths.”⁴¹ Such stories reinforced each other as a culture of mythic origins and spiritual meanings spread among these groups, particularly the Silver Legion. An intelligence memo from the archived files of the Anti-Defamation League in 1936 explained that Johnson’s talk “seemed very much like the mouthings of William Dudley Pelley.”⁴²

After the attack on Pearl Harbor and a series of congressional hearings on domestic fascism, the isolationist movement, which fought the U.S. entry into the war, became a conduit for fascists to launder their reputations. Like anti-Communism, isolationism could be a way to support European fascism. In 1942, Delmore Lessard, a former Silver Shirt, anointed himself the head of Oregon’s anti-interventionist America First Committee, disseminating pamphlets produced by the publisher responsible for the *Nachrichten*.⁴³ Lessard parlayed his isolationist bona fides into the post-war era by linking up with Senator Rufus C. Holman, a former Klansman and supporter of the Bund’s anti-boycott campaign, to create the anti-Zionist group, American Foundation, Inc., in 1947. Six years earlier, Senator Holman had told his fellow lawmakers:

I have always deplored Hitler’s ambitions as a conqueror. But he broke the control of these internationalists over the common people of Germany. It would be a good idea if the control of the international bankers over the common people of England was broken, and good if it was broken over the wages and savings of the common people of the United States.⁴⁴

Some refused to make any accommodation to war-time fervor. Particularly active in supporting the cause of Japanese internment, Silver Shirts leader Henry L. Beach submerged his fascist activities in what he discreetly called the “Research Group,” through which he hoped to

⁴¹ Business card for G. Fred Johnson, Lecturer, George E. Rennar Papers.

⁴² Memo, April 21d, 1936, George E. Rennar Papers.

⁴³ David Robinson (Reporter), Preliminary Organization Report, Oct 17 1941, George E. Rennar Papers.

⁴⁴ “Wheeler, Holman Scored as Injecting Anti-Semitism in Lend-Lease Debate,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 6, 1941. <https://www.jta.org/1941/03/06/archive/wheeler-holman-scored-as-injecting-anti-semitism-in-lend-lease-debate>; For Holman’s solidarity with the Bund, see Meeting notes, March 24, 1934, George E. Rennar Papers.

organize “ten thousand armed people in Portland.”⁴⁵ For arguing in favor of a fascist invasion of the US in 1942, Beach faced expulsion from the West Coast, which was under intense scrutiny by the military. However, he managed to remain through the duration of the war.

The defeat of the fascist regimes embittered those U.S. far-right groups that had attempted to coalesce during the inter-war period, but they soldiered on largely in opposition to the perceived Communist threat. In the process, they shifted from a state-defending ultra-nationalism to a state-subverting ultra-nationalist movement. By 1951, a new group based in Los Angeles called America Plus, Inc., had emerged from various factions of the far right. A distinguished retired Marine officer, Pedro del Valle, who claimed to have known Mussolini “personally and served with his forces in Ethiopia,” hoped America Plus would endorse his “Minutemen” idea that would “have a semi-military purpose in checking the violence and sabotage, which the enemy constantly perpetrates in our country.” America Plus proved receptive, but demanded absolute secrecy. To stem the tide of the “one-worlders” and “internationalists,” del Valle went on to form a new group called the Defenders of the American Constitution with other retired military officers.⁴⁶

Influenced by del Valle’s paranoid ideas and a California paramilitary group called The Rangers, far-right ideologue Robert DePugh and friends formed a secret militant group called The Minutemen to prepare for a Communist assault on the contiguous lower-48 states in 1960. They claimed tens of thousands of members, though the FBI estimated The Minutemen’s national membership at 400-1,000.⁴⁷ Silver Shirts and Klansmen joined the vigilante Minutemen, which went on to blow up a police station in Redmond, Washington, a thriving hub for regional Silver Shirts during the interwar period.⁴⁸ The group also plotted to blow up

⁴⁵ Alphabetical List of Individuals, HIA-R, Barnhart Collection, N-5D-3-125-7, p. 11, <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/images/Collections/78006/HIA-R-BARNHART-EDWARD-N-5D-3-125-7.pdf>.

⁴⁶ See letter exchange between del Valle to Irvin Borders of America Plus, sent August 14, 1951, and a response from American Plus via Aldrich Blake sent October 3, 1951. Regarding his claim about Mussolini, see de Valle’s letter sent August 9, 1962 and addressed to National States Rights Party organizer J. Paul Thornton. Pedro Del Valle papers, 1949-1978, University of Oregon Libraries, Coll 126. These sources are included in an excellent summary of del Valle’s work, which can be found in Kevin Coogan, *The Defenders of the American Constitution and the League of Empire Loyalists: The First Postwar Anglo-American Revolts against the “One World Order,”* a paper delivered at Amsterdam International Institute for Social History, 2004.

⁴⁷ Steward A. Wright. 2007. *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 58-61.

⁴⁸ Silver Shirts built a “Silver Lodge” in Redmond and congregated there during the

Redmond's City Hall, rob four banks, and assassinate Martin Luther King, Jr., with 1,400 pounds of stolen dynamite before the FBI caught up to them in January 1968.⁴⁹

In this environment, former Silver Shirts moved older myths in more paranoid directions, transforming the optimistic imperialism of British-Israelism into the angrier denial of the humanity of Jews and other minorities. The shifts in British-Israelism began back in the 1930s when the hatred of Jews overwhelmed its emphasis on British heritage, partly due to the influence of former Klan leaders and fascists. Antisemitic mythology crystalized within British-Israelism when its leaders located Jews outside of the "tribes of Judah," instead identifying them as a defiled Edomite race. The religion continued this path of radicalization, creating a series of arcane readings of the Bible that told an alternative racialized history of the Israelites whose spiritual battles are framed in terms of racial survival. By the 1960s, it had evolved into the apocalyptic Christian Identity religion, which promoted revolutionary violence.⁵⁰ Silver Shirts like John Metcalf, who experienced Pelley's spiritualism as uplifting, joined the post-war Christian Identity movement associated with another former Silver Shirt named Richard G. Butler and his Church of Jesus Christ-Christian of the Aryan Nations. Hence, Christian Identity built on British-Israel origin stories to promote white supremacy, but considered Jews the spawn of Satan and all non-whites "mud people."⁵¹

In 1969, Silver Shirt leader and Research Group founder, Henry L. Beach, worked with The Rangers' founder and Christian Identity leader, William Potter Gale, to establish the virulently antisemitic Posse Comitatus in Portland. Advocating vigilante anti-Semitism, Posse Comitatus foregrounded the sovereignty of local sheriffs, repudiating the authority of federal agencies. In an interview with the *Oregonian*, Beach recalled that the Silver Legion had been "a very spiritual group," and that

1930s. See McNamara, N. and "Temple For 'American Hitler' Once Stood In Redmond: Knute Berger," Redmond Patch, May 29, 2018, <https://patch.com/washington/redmond/temple-american-hitler-once-stood-redmond-knute-berger>. See also Silver Shirt Legion of America, Washington State Division photograph collection, circa 1930s, PH1521, University of Washington Libraries, <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv84258>.

⁴⁹ James Aho, *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 57. See also, "7 ARE CONVICTED IN PLOT ON COAST: Guilty of Conspiring to Rob Banks for Minutemen," New York Times, June 23, 1968.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 236-241.

⁵¹ See Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 199-254.

Pelley wielded extraordinary metaphysical powers, claiming that “Pelley taught me to communicate with the spirit world.”⁵² From those origins, Posse Comitatus rapidly became the prototype for the “militia movement” in the 1970s, concentrating working-class, rural resentment against what they labeled an encroaching federal government captured by outside influences, often assumed to be Jewish or of a competing, usually-Communist nation. When Butler created a compound on Hayden Lake north of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, under the auspices of the “Aryan Nations” in 1973, it quickly became a hub for the most extreme members of Posse Comitatus, as well as Klansmen and other fascists bent on race war across Oregon and Washington.⁵³ By the mid-70s, Beach was openly admonishing recruits to “[n]ever let it be known how many members you have.... Not knowing how many of you there are, makes the TRAITORS more afraid of the influence you have.”⁵⁴

Beach’s paranoia exhibited the general characteristics of prior generations of far-right activists, from the Klan’s idea of a secretive “invisible empire” to the nativist tendency to focus rage foremost on traitors and subversives who sap the inner strength of the nation. Although Posse Comitatus faltered at the decade’s end, it returned to prominence in the early-1980s by instrumentalizing rural disenfranchisement stemming from the farm crisis in the Midwest, connecting it to Richard Butler’s calls for a white homeland in the Pacific Northwest.⁵⁵ Butler’s Aryan Nations compound, then, became a center for the growing revolutionary fascist movements in the Pacific Northwest that would engage in organized crime and assassinations throughout the 1980s.⁵⁶

Beach’s prominence within the inter-war Silver Shirts and his creation of the Posse Comitatus helps cast light on how deeply the Oregon inter-war fascist movement came to influence the post-war “white power” movement. While maintaining its populist economic message, Oregon’s far-right evolved from a broad-based nativism to the militant “white power” movement. Part of this move toward the identity of whiteness instead of an ethnically defined Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and “100% American” nationalism took place as a result of coalition-forming

⁵² Quoted in Toy, “Silver Shirts in the Northwest,” 144.

⁵³ Kathy Marks, *Faces of Right Wing Extremism* (Boston, MA: Branden Books, 2011), 85, 139.

⁵⁴ Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004).

⁵⁵ Carolyn Gallaher, “On the Fault Line: Race, Class and the US Patriot Movement,” *Cultural Studies*, 16:5 (2002): 673-703.

⁵⁶ Timothy G. Baysinger, “Right-wing Group Characteristics and Ideology.” *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, Article 3 (July 2006).

organizing among ethnic nationalists from Italy and Germany in support of fascism. This new “white nationalism” replaced the religious, moralistically inclined nativism of the 1920s Klan and earlier movements through a strategic adaptation to the conditions of the New Deal and then World War II. Christian Identity took on a much more revolutionary character by the 1970s and 1980s than the earlier British-Israelism had during its life, reframing the story of supposed Anglo-Saxon diaspora portrayed as the “lost tribes of Israel” in eschatological terms, where racial enemies (Jews) and subordinates (non-whites) were seen as enemy combatants in a spiritual war that justified violence amid Armageddon.⁵⁷ Likewise, Posse Comitatus found a new form of organizing and narrative for rural discontent, one that was revolutionary since it saw the federal government as illegitimate and captured by alien interests. For both of these movements, the shift in ideological intensity and praxis comes along with a shift in larger social conditions as a result of the Civil Rights movement.⁵⁸

The new “white nationalist” or “white power” movement in the post-war period defined itself by a more revolutionary strategy, a more inclusive understanding of whiteness, and a belief that the U.S. government is fully captured by enemy interests. While fascist and nativist movements often relied on extra-judicial vigilante violence before the Second World War, they often maintained a more complicated relationship with the state, since vigilante violence often helped shore up existing power structures. With major socio-economic shifts involving Civil Rights, de-industrialization, and globalization, the federal government appeared to abandon its earlier nativist principles. Thus, the “white power” movement and its explicit reliance on revolutionary vigilantism tilted against the state just as much as against minority targets.⁵⁹ Whether exploiting the economic crisis of returning Vietnam veterans or disenfranchised farmers moving West during the early-1980s, the growing “white power” movement continued to contend with the radical left to build a base among people subjected to dire economic conditions and the dissolution of community bonds through changes in the

⁵⁷ George Michael, *Theology of Hate: A History of the World Church of the Creator* (Gainesville, University of Press of Florida, 2009), 49-50.

⁵⁸ Aaron Winter (2011), ‘Posse Comitatus’, *Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict*, ed. J. I. Ross, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 575-580.

⁵⁹ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 106-17.

economic geography of the U.S..⁶⁰

In these conditions a new form of thinking became hegemonic in the fascist movement, focused on the creation of an entirely new state or type of society rather than simply making profound reforms to the existing one. This is where the term “white nationalist” emerged from, which tries to distinguish itself from white supremacy by defining itself as the ideological pursuit of white political sovereignty and social separation from non-whites.⁶¹ The interwar period of fascist movements helped to bridge the nativism of the Klan with the hyper-focus on racial purity found in the white power movement by reframing the enemies in explicitly racial terms rather than just of competing cultures. This process de-emphasized things like the opposition to Catholicism and instead focused on anti-Communism, primarily because Communism focused on a form of social equality that would challenge their racial taxonomy.

Today, continued economic instability links the growth of Oregon’s far-right to the past, where largely rural and blue-collar areas of the state experience the resurgence of the Patriot militia movements, while “Independent Trumpist” organizations like Patriot Prayer and their Alt Right bedfellows bring fascism to bear again in cities like Portland.⁶² Such trends will only persist if economic prospects for rural Oregon stagnate, while left-wing social movements, which provide a narrative and strategy around mobilizing anti-chauvinistic responses to class experiences, remain isolated in urban areas.⁶³⁶⁴

⁶⁰ We refer to these by what Comparative Fascist Studies scholar Robert O. Paxton labels “mobilizing passions,” which are the driving facts that create revolutionary impulses in constituencies, such as economic or social upheavals and discontent. In this way, socialist organizations could speak to the economic conditions of rural workers in the same way that right-wing ones could, but a different pool of politicization was available because of the existing material conditions. Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 41.

⁶¹ George Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2016), 246. It should be noted that this distinction does not absolve white nationalists of the description of white supremacy, since their ideology is simply a particular strategic implementation of white supremacy. In this case, it is pursuing political separation motivated by their belief in their inherent supremacy.

⁶² Spencer Sunshine, “The Growing Alliance Between Neo-Nazis, Right Wing Paramilitaries and Trumpist Republicans,” *Colorlines*, June 9, 2017, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/growing-alliance-between-neo-nazis-right-wing-paramilitaries-and-trumpist-republicans>.

⁶³ Spencer Sunshine, Interview with Shane Burley, December 12, 2016.

⁶⁴ The authors want to thank Larry Lipin for substantial editorial assistance. This is an expanded version of an essay published in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Shane Burley and Alexander Reid Ross, “From Nativism to White Power: The Interwar Fascist Movement in Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (2019).

Antisemitism and the Left: Confronting an Invisible Racism

Sina Arnold & Blair Taylor¹

The resurgence of antisemitism – from the deadly Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, the alt-right’s chant of “Jews will not replace us,” up to recent controversies within the Women’s March and UK Labour Party – caught many observers off guard. Although antisemitism is on the rise in the U.S., it has – until recently – remained conspicuously absent from progressive/left discourse and activism. These recent incidents have restored the term to the lexicon of the left, however there remains a tendency to focus exclusively on the more deadly antisemitism of the right while remaining silent about less deadly manifestations on the left. This article seeks to fill this political and analytical void by highlighting this “invisible” form of racism, challenging some common assumptions found on the left, and offering analytical and political tools rooted in an emancipatory perspective. We show that the left has a long and complicated historical relationship with antisemitism. By focusing on how antisemitism can manifest in left critiques of capitalism or global politics, we illustrate how it both overlaps with and diverges from the antisemitism of the right. We use recent examples to describe common rhetorical strategies employed to deny or downplay the existence of antisemitism within left movements, or derail conversations about it from taking place. As antisemitism continues to shape the contemporary political landscape, we argue that emancipatory movements must become familiar with its specific contours and actively address it in their political work. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

The resurgence of antisemitism – from the deadly Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, the alt-right’s chant of “Jews will not replace us,” up to recent controversies within the Women’s March and UK Labour Party – caught many observers off guard. Although antisemitism is on the rise in the U.S. and globally, it has – until recently – remained conspicuously absent from progressive/left discourse and political activism. This silence has been compounded by the fact that attempts to address antisemitism have frequently been met by a set of responses rather unusual within a left culture typically sensitive to claims of racism.

Firstly, opposition to antisemitism is often presumed to be an automatic and inherent feature of belonging to the left: since leftists oppose all forms of racism and oppression, this, by definition, includes antisemitism. Second, many progressives assume that antisemitism is no longer a serious or systemic social problem, and therefore requires no specific attention – especially in comparison to anti-black and anti-Arab racism (Rosenblum 2007, Arnold 2015, Sunshine 2017). Lastly, some leftists often claim that addressing antisemitism is only a cynical smokescreen for defending Israel; “hasbara” – a euphemism for Israeli propaganda – that disguises anti-Arab, Zionist, and other right-wing positions in antiracist veneer. As a result of these dynamics, many on the left respond to allegations of antisemitism with uncharacteristic suspicion if not derision, in some quarters abandoning it as an issue owned by the political right.

This article seeks to fill this political and analytical void by shining a light on an “invisible” form of racism, challenging some common assumptions found on the left, and offering analytical and political tools rooted in an emancipatory perspective. We will show that the left has a long and complicated historical relationship with antisemitism, one including instances where it not only went unchallenged, but was actively reproduced. This endeavor requires clarifying how antisemitism is different from other forms of racism, outlining its core tropes and delineating it as a uniquely racialized worldview. We use recent examples to describe common rhetorical strategies employed to deny or downplay the existence of antisemitism within left movements, or derail conversations about it from taking place.

We will also highlight key historical and intellectual shifts that have shaped how left movements do or do not discuss antisemitism, a legacy that continues to mold movement discourse today. Although the recent resurgence of virulent antisemitism has put the term back into the lexicon of the left, there remains a strong tendency to focus exclusively on the

more deadly antisemitism of the right while remaining silent on less violent manifestations on the left. By focusing on how antisemitism can manifest in left critiques of capitalism, modernity, or global politics, we illustrate how it both overlaps with and diverges from the antisemitism of the right. Lastly, we will explore antisemitism in relation to the centrality of Israel and Palestine in contemporary left discourse, and the reluctance to grapple with complicated issues of framing, salience, and unwanted political bedfellows.

This text focuses primarily on the left in the United States. American leftists often tend to see antisemitism as primarily a European phenomenon, one mostly restricted to the distant past. Certainly, there have been a few attempts to address contemporary antisemitism on the left, such as April Rosenblum's pamphlet *The Past Didn't Go Anywhere* (2007), the Marxist Humanist Initiative essay "Beware of Left Anti-Semitism" (2011), the collective open letter "Not Quite 'Ordinary Human Beings'—Anti-imperialism and the Anti-Humanist Rhetoric of Gilad Atzmon" (2012), Spencer Sunshine's "The Left Must Root Out Antisemitism in Its Ranks" (2017), and "Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering to Our Movement" from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ 2017). However, these resources remain largely unknown and invisible. Most non-Jewish Americans are unaware of the long history of antisemitism in the United States, which if acknowledged at all, is understood as a problem of the past and not the present. By contrast, we will demonstrate that antisemitism continues to be a threat globally, including in the United States.

For this reason, confronting antisemitism in theory and practice is a necessary component of any emancipatory, antiracist politics or theory. This requires becoming aware of the history of antisemitism on the left and acknowledging that left movements have – until very recently and with few exceptions – mostly overlooked this form of oppression. While the left has no problem identifying and denouncing the more overt and deadly manifestations of antisemitism of the right, it has difficulty seeing and addressing more subtle forms on the left. As we detail below, left activists often react defensively to allegations of antisemitism. If it is not dismissed as a smear, one frequently hears that right antisemitism is worse. In our view, these patterns are not the result of conscious antisemitic intent, but rather ignorance of what constitutes antisemitism and unexamined political assumptions. But in the face of growing threats and violence to Jewish people across the globe, such responses are insufficient. We therefore hope this article can make a small contribution to the articulation of an emancipatory analysis of antisemitism.

WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM?

Perhaps the most common reason why leftists overlook antisemitism is that they assume it functions the same as other forms of racism, thus missing those features which make it specific and distinct. It certainly can and does take the form of simple racial prejudice or discrimination against Jews – and on the far-right overt or biological race hatred is still common. However, antisemitism is unique in that historically it evolved as part of a broader anti-modern ideology closely linked to the rise of bourgeois society, i.e. capitalism, cosmopolitanism, and the modern nation-state (Benz 2005, Volkov 1978). Of course, antisemitism has many elements in common with other forms of racism: Jews as a group are essentialized; they are assigned negative attributes and discriminated against in various areas of life – features shared by all racisms. There are, however, also important differences between antisemitism and other forms of racism – just as there are differences in the specific forms of racism towards Blacks, Asians, Arabs and other groups. In general terms, what might be called “colonial” forms of racism directed at colonized people, indigenous groups, or African slaves construct “the other” as inferior, uncivilized, and sub-human. This “other” symbolizes nature and uncontrollable sexuality, and is associated with the body and emotion in contrast to mind and reason. This in turn leads to characterizations as less intelligent, criminal, and lazy. Presented as inferior, it is therefore assumed that this “other” must be suppressed, exploited, and excluded (Arnold 2018).

By contrast, “the Jew” is generally less associated with nature but with modernity and society. Jews are “over-civilized,” suspiciously intelligent and physically weak, rootless cosmopolitans lacking loyalty to community or country. They are depicted as overly individualistic (yet at the same time cliquishly tribal), money-grubbing materialists who have grown powerful and wealthy through dishonesty and trickery. In short, they are the personification of all the negative aspects of modern society. As “the Jews” are perceived as either openly running the world or secretly conspiring to do so, antisemitism ultimately does not seek to merely keep “the other” down, but rather to destroy their perceived hegemonic power – Nazi eliminationism would take this to its logical conclusion. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) treats antisemitism as a pathological expression of capitalism’s tendency to abolish the possibility of a radically different world. It describes how the experience of the domination inherent to a capitalist society based on the unending drive for profit rather than human need can become hatred towards Jews: “No matter what the makeup of the Jews

may be in reality, their image, that of the defeated, has characteristics which must make totalitarian rule their mortal enemy: happiness without power, reward without work, a homeland without frontiers, religion without myth. These features are outlawed by the ruling powers because they are secretly covered by the ruled.” (2002: 164-65). It is precisely this posture – as a critique of power and capitalism – that has made the left more susceptible to antisemitism than other forms of racism; it is no accident the German socialist leader August Bebel was quoted as calling it “socialism of fools” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, Postone 2006, Battini 2016).

Thus, although antisemitism includes prejudice and discrimination based on racialized group categories, on a more fundamental level it is an expansive anti-modern worldview offered as a supposed critique of bourgeois society. Antisemitism targets central features of modern society – abstractness, universality, mobility, cosmopolitanism, and capitalism – all of which become identified with and personified as “the Jew” (Battini 2016). Understanding the distinctive nature of antisemitism is crucial to recognizing it. As antisemitism is a worldview, one’s subject position or identity provides no immunity against it: Leftists are rightly unconvinced when the right legitimizes racism by holding up Clarence Thomas or Thomas Sowell, or dismiss sexism via Laura Southern or Phyllis Schlafly. Likewise Jews, people of color, and professed antiracists are not immune from reproducing antisemitic stereotypes.

In contemporary left discussions of racism, privilege-checking, call-out culture, and soul-searching have become the norm, while questioning such allegations is generally perceived as defending racism. Viewed in this context, the left’s double standard regarding accusations of antisemitism is all the more glaring.

ANTISEMITISM AND THE AMERICAN LEFT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A variety of historical examples make it clear that US leftists have not been immune to antisemitic thinking. The Populists of the late 19th century at times engaged in antisemitic imagery that associated Jews with banks and economic exploitation, making “the Jew a symbol of capitalism and urbanism, concepts in themselves too abstract to be satisfactory objects of animosity” (Moore 1981: 103). The Old Left, and especially the Communist Party, was ambivalent regarding antisemitism, but generally aligned with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’s (CPSU) positions, including ignoring or endorsing antisemitic show trials which

portrayed Jewish party members as disloyal traitors in the Soviet Union under Stalin, in Czechoslovakia, and East Germany (Norwood 2013).

The political legacy of the New Left is of particular relevance. During the 1960s, anti-imperialism and antizionism became increasingly central to New Left politics. Occasionally, the latter was expressed in antisemitic ways. Generally, this took the form of equating Jews with Israel and holding them collectively responsible for Israeli actions. Abundant examples can be found in the New Left radical press, as when the Socialist Workers Party paper claimed: “Jews contributed men, money and influence to make Israel a reality and to perpetuate the crimes committed against Palestinians. The people of the Book...changed roles from oppressed to oppressor” (Forster and Epstein 1974: 130). A communiqué from The New World Liberation Front, an urban guerrilla group active in the 1970s, is more extreme:

These Zionist ruling class pigs will not butcher poor people fighting for a just life without suffering drastic repercussions. The Jewish-American ruling class cannot protect themselves well enough for a sufficient amount of time. They should consider this carefully! We will show the Jewish-American ruling class how extremely vulnerable they are, here in the belly of the beast. Their lives will be in grave jeopardy if mad-dog Rabin imposes this massacre on the Palestinian people... We call on all comrades to move directly against all Jewish-American ruling class bloodsuckers if Rabin moves to massacre freedom fighters! These ruling class dogs are influential both here and in Israel and are extremely vulnerable (1976).

Here, American Jews are directly threatened with violence for the crimes of Israel and global capitalism, combined and embodied in the conspiratorial figure of the “Jewish-American ruling class,” depicted as parasitic “bloodsuckers” and “dogs” which must be put down. The article was accompanied by a racist cartoon featuring stereotypical images of plotting, hooked-nosed Jews. During Jesse Jackson’s 1984 presidential bid, this representative of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party referred to New York City as “Hymietown,” “hymie” being a racist slur for Jews (Joyce 1984). Many leftists defended Jackson or tried to rationalize his comments (Lester 1985, “For Jesse Jackson” 1986). These examples of tolerance and apologetics for open antisemitism illuminate a persistent double standard in left discourse when compared to other forms of racism.

THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LEFT

If there was any doubt, the Tree of Life synagogue shooting in 2018 forcefully demonstrated that antisemitism persists as a deadly threat. According to a 2014 poll, 26 percent of all respondents in 101 countries agreed to at least 6 out of 11 anti-Jewish statements (Anti-Defamation League 2014). The United States was no exception; while antisemitic attitudes were less pronounced there, 19 percent still judged the statement “Jews have too much influence/control on Wall Street” as “true” or “probably true,” while 14 percent agreed to the statement “Jews today have too much influence in the US.” Antisemitic incidents (including physical assaults, vandalism, and attacks on Jewish institutions) spiked by nearly 60 percent in 2017, the largest single-year increase recorded (Anti-Defamation League 2018). Moreover, awareness towards historical antisemitism is not high: A recent national survey of Holocaust awareness and knowledge among US adults revealed that there are not only significant gaps in historical knowledge about the Holocaust but also that 70 percent of Americans say fewer people seem to care about the Holocaust than they used to (Claims Conference 2018). These developments have effects on Jewish Americans: In a 2019 Survey of American Jews, 84 percent of the respondents had the perception that antisemitism had increased over the past five years, and 42 percent felt less secure than a year ago (American Jewish Committee 2019).

In the last twenty years there have been four antisemitic mass shootings in the United States. In 2006 Naveed Afzal Haq began a shooting spree at the Seattle Jewish Federation by screaming, “I’m a Muslim American; I’m angry at Israel!” In a subsequent 9-11 call, he declared his actions were politically motivated by George W. Bush, Islamophobia, Israel, and the Iraq War – standard left issues of the 2000s. In 2009, a white supremacist killed a security guard at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., and in 2014, long-time white supremacist Frazier Glenn Miller went on a murderous rampage targeting a Jewish institution in Kansas City, killing three. The Tree of Life shooter claimed 11 lives in 2018, shortly after posting online about “the filthy *evil* jews Bringing the Filthy *evil* Muslims into the Country!!” (Gessen 2018). Yet in contrast to other outbursts of racist violence, with few exceptions left-wing media outlets had little, if anything, to say about these incidents. Unlike cases of Islamophobic violence, they did not lead to calls for greater national reflection or the need to confront antisemitism (Shire 2018, Tabarovsky 2019, Mudede 2015, Hsieh and Sanders 2017).

Let us now turn to how the contemporary U.S. left addresses

antisemitism. There are relatively few examples of *open antisemitism* in left circles. The Bush-era anti-war movement at times featured antisemitic imagery (Arnold 2015). Images of hooked-nosed Jews clutching the world in their hands are not uncommon on posters and banners at protests against Israel (Wistrich 2012: 472). Antisemitism could also be found in the margins of the Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS). A man repeatedly appeared at the Zuccotti Park encampment in NYC holding signs saying “Google: Jewish Bankers.” He was confronted by a handful of others holding counter-signs stating his views did not represent theirs or those of the movement generally (Goldberg 2011). However, a visibly Jewish man was later attacked at the same location after being confronted on the street. Antisemitic conspiracy theories appeared with some frequency in Occupy online forums. A Facebook page titled “Occupy Wall Street” that had no connection to the actual movement prominently featured antisemitic images.

Yet this “fake” page ultimately attracted far more likes than the official Occupy Facebook page (Arnold 2015). Although unsolicited, the Occupy movement attracted a variety of right-wing sympathizers with different agendas. In a video entitled “Occupy Zionist Wall Street,” noted white supremacist David Duke praised those who attack the international banks supposedly holding America hostage. The American Nazi Party also voiced support for OWS, lauding its potential for making “the Natives” aware of the influence of Jewish “Wall Street bankers” and stating that “this issue is TAYLOR MADE [sic] for National Socialists.” Several Nazi groups attempted to infiltrate Occupy encampments but were mostly turned away (Lyons 2011). At the same time, less explicitly right-wing actors like the conspiracy theorist David Icke were welcomed within some Occupy camps (Sunshine 2014). This interest from the right shows the potential for antisemitism posed by vague populist and personalistic critiques of capitalist society.

More recently, a variety of avowedly intersectionalist movements have been marred by allegations of antisemitism. The Women’s March has faced a cascade of accusations including anti-Jewish statements made at their first meeting, noticeably omitting Jewish oppression from public statements, and associating with the antisemitic, anti-feminist and homophobic Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan, leader of the black Muslim organization Nation of Islam, has a long history of making antisemitic comments (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). The group’s reaction to critics was defensive and dismissive, eventually issuing general statements condemning antisemitism and transphobia but refusing to hold Farrakhan and his organization accountable. Women’s March Co-Chair Carmen

Perez publicly called the issue a “distraction” (Harnish 2018), Co-President Tamika Mallory called for “empathy” and the need for “nuance and complexities”.² Equivocations like these are unfortunately part of a common pattern wherein accusations of antisemitism are dismissed as politically-motivated attempts to divide and discredit movements for social justice, or as distractions from more important matters. The result is that antisemitism cannot be addressed on its own terms, but only indirectly through reference to other issues.

In 2017, three Jewish lesbians participating in the Chicago Dyke March were asked to leave because they were holding a rainbow flag with a star of David on it, which event organizers claimed was a “Zionist” symbol. In 2015, a Black Lives Matter rally in Seattle stopped outside a new marijuana dispensary to decry gentrification, but one speaker used the occasion to accuse the Jewish owner of being from Israel and serving in the Israeli Defense Force (Mudede 2015). In reality, his family had lived in the community for several generations and he had never been to Israel. At a subsequent protest at the same shop, another prominent local activist was caught on camera telling the owner to “go back to Germany” and “let them Nazis get on you again,” implying the long-time local resident didn’t belong and should return to face antisemitic violence in Europe (Brownstone 2017).

These incidents demonstrate both the persistence of the antisemitic trope that Jews are malevolent outsiders who are fundamentally alien to and preying upon the “real” community, and the notion that Israel stands at the center of global evil. The first theme was prominent in Nazi propaganda, given paradigmatic expression in an infamous cartoon from *Der Stürmer* depicting a “Jewish worm” eating its way through an apple labeled the “German economy” with a caption reading: “when something is rotten, the Jew is behind it.” The second is illustrated by how frequently otherwise fractious left movements find common ground in anti-Israel activism, highly visible even in movements with little connection to Middle East politics. Jewish Voice for Peace’s “Deadly Exchange” campaign provides a contemporary example, which attempts to project blame for racist police violence in the U.S. onto Israel (and Jewish groups like the ADL) by highlighting law enforcement exchange programs between the two nations that allegedly share “worst practices,” resting on a chain of highly tenuous linkages (Elman 2019). The centrality of anti-Israel discourse on the left has made it a point of resonance with far-right actors encompassing white supremacists like David Duke and Islamic

² Cp. Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TamikaDMallory/status/970490221598072834>

fundamentalists from Louis Farrakhan to Hamas (Laquer 2006).

Ilhan Omar, the first Somali and one of the first two Muslims elected to U.S. Congress in 2018, sparked a fierce antisemitism controversy. First, a tweet from 2012 was discovered which stated that “Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel,” recycling tropes of occult Jewish manipulation of the world (Bresnahan 2019). This was soon followed by another tweet which suggested Republican support for Israel was “all about the Benjamins” and naming the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as the paymaster. Critics charged that these statements mobilized the classic antisemitic trope of a shadowy group of powerful Jews secretly controlling government, reminiscent of the “Zionist Occupied Government” or “ZOG” theory of the far-right, while others responded it was an accurate description of how the pro-Israel lobby works. As Michelle Goldberg, a New York Times columnist who is herself highly critical of Israel, noted:

[A]t a moment when activists have finally pried open space in American politics to question our relationship with Israel, it’s particularly incumbent on Israel’s legitimate critics to avoid anything that smacks of anti-Jewish bigotry. And the idea of Jews as global puppet masters, using their financial savvy to make the gentiles do their bidding, clearly does (2019).

Although Omar herself apologized and graciously thanked her Jewish colleagues for educating her, a variety of left media outlets condemned her apology and doubled down on her statements. The prominent left magazine *Jacobin* unleashed a deluge of headlines proclaiming: “Ilhan Omar Was Right,” “Ilhan Omar is not Antisemitic,” and “Democrats are Failing Ilhan Omar” (Ackerman 2019, Kulwin 2019, Savage 2019). While some commentators criticized a few of Omar’s statements, most defenses focused on the Islamophobia and bad faith of her Republican critics; none mentioned the many Jews who expressed hurt at her words.

As previously noted, the contemporary left’s definitional identity of standing for equality and opposing racial hatred and discrimination means that “primary antisemitism” – overt prejudice and discrimination against Jews – is rarely seen on an individual level and is indeed often vocally opposed. Yet, as we know from other forms of racism, the absence of explicit statements of racial animosity does not mean that the bigotry doesn’t exist. The above examples demonstrate the left’s willingness to overlook or excuse both conscious and unintentional antisemitism, especially if it happens in the context of criticizing Israel or defending

fellow leftists. Instead of open expressions of antisemitism, what we see on the left are various patterns, reactions, and discourses that make it impossible to discuss. In the following sections we identify three common responses to attempts to discuss antisemitism on the left: *denying*, *downplaying*, and *derailing*. We will examine each of these dynamics in turn.

SHUTTING DOWN DISCUSSIONS OF ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT: THREE COMMON DYNAMICS

Denial and Downplaying

Understanding themselves as members of a structurally racist and (hetero)sexist society, left activists often show a high degree of sensitivity and self-criticism regarding oppression and domination. Yet on a standard list of “isms” targeted by the left – capitalism, racism, sexism, and so on – antisemitism usually doesn’t make the cut. Occupy Wall Street, for example, engaged in lively debates about white privilege and racism within the movement, and also debated how to address the sexual assaults and male dominance that occurred in some encampments. But despite several instances of open antisemitism and the widespread participation of right-wing activists, antisemitism was not a similar topic of discussion. Although there were no reported instances of overt anti-black racism, this didn’t stop it from becoming a key theme for the movement. By contrast, the Women’s March had to be forced to include antisemitism in their statements of intersectional solidarity. Organization spokeswoman Linda Sarsour suggested that while antisemitism exists, it is not a systemic form of racism – erasing the highly systemic nature of the Holocaust and the central role antisemitism plays in the worldview of the far-right (Pidly 2018, Ward 2017). This creates a tacit hierarchy of oppression on the left, wherein by virtue of being seen as white (also invisibilizing Jews of color), Jews cannot also be understood as victims of racial oppression – overlooking the fact that according to the far-right, they are not.

A textbook example of downplaying is the book *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (Cockburn and St. Clair 2002). Widely available in left bookstores, where it is often the only book on the subject, it clearly announces its intention from the first page: “I think we should almost never take antisemitism seriously,” and adding, “...maybe we should have some fun with it” (p. 1). On the rare occasion antisemitism is acknowledged to exist, it is trivialized: “Undoubtedly there is genuine antisemitism in the Arab world: the distribution of the *Protocols of the*

Elders of Zion, the myths about stealing the blood of gentile babies. This is utterly inexcusable. So was your failure to answer Aunt Bee's last letter" (Cockburn and St. Clair 2002: 7). Ten out of the eighteen chapters address not antisemitism, but its "misuse" by groups who accuse pro-Palestinian activists of it. Not one contribution deals with the historical background of antisemitism in general, or the left in particular. Instead it assumes antisemitism is an irrelevant issue, especially in contrast to Islamophobia. This is perhaps unsurprising given the book is co-published by *Counterpunch*, an ostensibly left magazine that has given space to white nationalists and antisemites including Alison Weir, Israel Shamir, Paul Craig Roberts, Eric Walburg, and Gilad Atzmon (Levick 2002, Wolfe 2016). What is more surprising is that left authors and publishers would produce a book whose primary function is to downplay and deny the existence of antisemitism.

Another recent example can be found in the U.S. left reaction to the attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo by Islamists in Paris. Its central concern was not the 12 left-wing journalists murdered by right-wing extremists, but rather the magazine's alleged disproportionate and overgeneralizing focus on Islam (an allegation challenged by an empirical study by *Le Monde Diplomatique*).³ While some portrayals of Muslim and Islam in Charlie Hebdo are indeed questionable, many activists completely refused solidarity with what was perceived as a racist publication, often without knowledge of the French political context or language.⁴ In the rush to confront the symbolic racism of cartoons and the potential for anti-Muslim backlash, the left completely ignored the deadly racism that had already occurred – the murder of four Jews in a nearby kosher supermarket carried out by an associate of the attackers. This incident reveals a highly selective antiracism, wherein one form of violent racism – restricted neither to the page nor possible future scenarios – is excluded from left discourse entirely.

Antisemitism is therefore not typically recognized as a problem worth discussing on the left. Attempts to bring it up are routinely greeted with denial, defensiveness, and hostility. Indeed, antisemitism is unique in that

³ For an analysis of the context and content of Hebdo cartoons, including documentation of the proportion of covers devoted to Islam – out of 538, 483 focused on politics, economics, and sport, while of the 38 focusing on religious themes, 21 targeted Christianity and 7 Islam. <http://www.understandingcharliehebdo.com/>

⁴ Richard Seymour's *Jacobin* article "On Charlie Hebdo" provides the best, but not a unique example. We could find no mention of the antisemitic murders in any left publications, only Jewish ones.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/01/charlie-hebdo-islamophobia/>

the left has a specific term used to dismiss it – “hasbara,” a synonym for Israeli propaganda. Already in the 1980s, Jewish feminist Irena Klepfisz has called this refusal to engage with the topic “antisemitism by omission” (1989, p. 52).

Derailing

The dynamic of derailing has become a familiar one in left and liberal discourse. It describes a situation where a discussion about a particular issue is redirected to a different topic, changing the subject but also typically reframing it in a manner which justifies or rationalizes the issue being discussed. To give a recent example, conservative opponents of the Black Lives Matter movement tried to derail conversations about racist policing by pivoting to generalized assertions that “all lives matter.” Although left activists are generally sensitive to this dynamic, it happens with great regularity regarding antisemitism. Instead of discussing antisemitism, activists often immediately redirect to its cynical use to justify Israeli policy and silence its critics. In research interviews with left activists, conversations were repeatedly redirected from discussing antisemitism to *accusations* of antisemitism, and its alleged abuse (Arnold 2015). Again, this double standard stands out as the contemporary left is not typically prone to doubting accusations of racism. If conversations about Islamophobia were repeatedly redirected to talk only about the problem of Islamist terrorism, this would be rightly denounced as derailing a discussion of racism. Generally, such derailments redirect to Israel; indeed, this dynamic has been described by antisemitism scholar David Hirsh as “The Livingstone Formulation” (2016). As a result, antisemitism can never be addressed by the left as a social phenomenon on its own, but only in relation to Israel.

Once again, the double standard is clear; the left would never tolerate discussing Islamophobia only after first addressing Islamic terrorism or Iranian state policy. In these cases, it would be obvious that these are distinct subjects not to be conflated, and that racism is by definition an irrational ideology that doesn’t require reasons. Antisemitism has the dubious honor of being one of the only forms of racism where the left is often quick to suggest such reasons. This, of course, is the very definition of rationalization.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Attempts to discuss antisemitism on the left almost always turn into

discussions of Israel. We have already provided several reasons why mixing these two distinct issues is problematic: While it is obviously necessary to talk about the Middle East conflict, antisemitism must also be taken seriously and addressed on its own terms. Yet this very conflation, along with the great prominence the Middle East conflict is given within contemporary left discourse, requires careful attention to the specific patterns and forms criticism of Israel takes. *To state the obvious, criticism of Israel in itself is not antisemitic.* Yet, as with any form of racism, antisemitism is not only, or even primarily, expressed as explicit racial hatred; it frequently takes the form of coded language, heightened attention to actual events, or the application of double standards.

For this reason, distinguishing between antisemitism, antizionism, and critiques of Israel and its policies is not nearly as simple as the left presumes. Increasingly, the standard left response to any accusation of antisemitism in the context of Israel/Palestine is to insist on a fundamental distinction between antizionism, which is legitimate, and antisemitism, which is racist. Unfortunately, a simple change in terminology does not guarantee that a particular discourse or action is non-racist (Kaplan and Small 2006, Hirsh 2018). According to the normal standards of antiracist practice, this is an uncontroversial fact. Many leftists readily accept that as open racism has become less socially acceptable, it assumes coded forms: “welfare queens,” “thugs,” hyper-predators,” “bad hombres,” etc... The same holds true for antisemitism, the historical background being what sociologists Bergmann and Erb (1986) have termed “communication latency,” i.e. describing how the Holocaust created a public taboo in Western countries on openly antisemitic statements. Antizionism thus was one form of “detour communication,” a socially acceptable way of denouncing Jews via the Jewish state (Bergmann and Erb 1986, Beyer and Krumpal 2013).

In fact, one easily finds numerous instances where antizionism is indeed motivated by antisemitism, or is indistinguishable from it. Today, the most explicit antisemites – neo-Nazis, white nationalists, and fundamentalist Islamists – also speak of “Zionists” rather than or in addition to the more straightforward term “Jews.” David Duke frequently speaks of Zionist control over the U.S. government, and was an enthusiastic defender of representative Ilhan Omar. After years of defense, prominent activists like Gilad Atzmon and Alison Weir were eventually asked to leave the Palestine solidarity movement for repeatedly crossing the line into blatant antisemitism. Left antizionists protesting against the annual Israel Day parade in New York City jostle uncomfortably among Islamists carrying antisemitic banners that equate Jews with cockroaches or proclaim that the

“Final Solution to the Middle East = Nuke Tel Aviv.” Thus, while it is logically true that antizionism isn’t inherently antisemitic, these and many other examples just as conclusively demonstrate that it nonetheless can be, and historically often has been in left-wing spaces (Norwood 2013, Haury 2002). Moreover, empirical studies have shown a correlation between anti-Jewish statements and criticisms of Israel (Beyer and Liebe 2016, Imhoff 2012, Kaplan and Small 2006). In light of these facts and unwanted political bedfellows, the common left mantra that “antizionism is not antisemitism” is inadequate if the left is to take antisemitism seriously. There is no magic safe word that can be used to dismiss accusations of antisemitism, or any other form of racism. Antiracists can’t afford to simply take words at face value, but must rather closely scrutinize the context, content, and patterns of political statements.

For this reason, it is necessary to articulate a consistent set of criteria for distinguishing legitimate criticism of Israel from antisemitic forms. Antisemitism scholar Alan Johnson offers a useful general criterion:

Antisemitic antizionism bends the meaning of Israel and Zionism out of shape until both become fit receptacles for the tropes, images and ideas of classical antisemitism. In short, that which the demonological Jew once was, demonological Israel now is: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricky, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment, and so on (2015).

Another useful tool is the 3D test of antisemitism, standing for delegitimization, demonization, and double standards (Sharansky 2004). Note that none on their own is a clear indication of antisemitism; depending on the context, each can simply reflect political priority and emphasis. However, they provide a useful diagnostic framework by which to assess antisemitism, especially when several of these dynamics appear at once. All three are common within the contemporary U.S. left.

Delegitimization. Although Israel was established in accordance with international law and the United Nations, its right to exist as a nation-state has been challenged – both militarily and politically – since its inception. These arguments may be based on anarchist or antinational claims that *all* states are illegitimate, on liberal antizionist positions that Israel cannot grant special status and priority to Jews and at the same time guarantee equal rights to all of its citizens, or on orthodox religious positions from Jewish groups like Neturei Karta who believe founding a Jewish state before the return of the Messiah is wrong. However, in most cases the

delegitimization of Israel makes it almost unique among contemporary nation-states. It is this often-unstated political goal that has led even fervent Palestinian activists like Norman Finkelstein (2012) and Noam Chomsky (2014) to criticize the Boycott Divest Sanctions (BDS) movement, which in their estimation views the very existence of Israel as illegitimate, whereas they seek to change its policies, however radically.

Demonization. While the purpose of political propaganda is to incite, criticism of Israel often takes especially virulent forms that veer into total demonization. Left critics frequently go beyond targeting specific government policies to question Israel's basic right to exist. Israel is routinely characterized as a uniquely bloodthirsty, evil, and powerful state – all of which mirror the historical tropes of antisemitism, right down to the harvesting of organs, the killing of small children or the poisoning of wells. It is commonly depicted as a brutally racist dictatorship engaged in “genocide,” including historically inaccurate comparisons to South African Apartheid and highly insensitive analogies to the Nazi regime.⁵

Although there is unfortunately no shortage of nation-states that violate human rights or that are engaged in bloody land disputes, the left concentrates disproportionate attention on Israel compared to other governments. Next door to Israel, the Syrian government and the Islamic State have both been documented using chemical weapons against civilians, but only Israelis are labeled “People Who Kill Children” in left media, as the title of one *Jacobin* article bluntly declared, recalling the blood libel trope (Shupak 2014). While many counter by saying this heightened scrutiny is warranted due to the close relationship between the United States and Israel, this defense does not address the left's lack of attention to similar relationships with allies such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or India. There is no correlate BDS movement targeting these regimes, nor do these conflicts routinely emerge in unrelated movements.

Often this demonization does not stop with the Israeli government, but extends to all Israelis, anywhere and anytime. A large section of the BDS movement holds all Israelis everywhere accountable for the crimes of their government. As a result, any event anywhere in the world today that

⁵ The “Apartheid” designation overlooks some inconvenient facts; to take but one example, the Israeli Knesset currently has proportionally more Arab-Israeli members (13 percent) than the U.S. Congress has African American representatives (8 percent). Arab and Palestinian citizens of Israel can vote and have political parties. The Nazism analogy similarly ignores that Israel has not engaged in the calculated extermination of Palestinians -- something well within the capacity of Israel's far more powerful military. Indeed, it must overlook their unilateral withdrawal from both Gaza and Sinai, a strange course of action if “genocide” is the goal. None of this diminishes ongoing violence in the Occupied Territories, but accurate terminology matters.

features Israelis, regardless of political commitments or sponsorship, is likely to be targeted for protest and boycott. Even more troubling, this demonization has expanded to also include non-Israeli Jews, as in case of Jewish-American musician Matisyahu being barred from playing a Spanish music festival in 2015 without first stating his position on the Israel/Palestine conflict.

No other left movement holds an entire nation, its individual citizens, or members of an entire religious faith directly accountable for the crimes of their (or not their) government. In fact, attempts to do so regarding other groups – targeting Muslims for professions of national loyalty after 9/11 for example – have been rightly deemed racist. Such demonization is often accompanied by ideological generalizations which assume particular political groups or tendencies within Israel – such as the far-right Israeli political party Likud – speak for the entire population. This stands in sharp contrast to assumptions regarding the other side, as when leftists claim Hamas doesn't speak for all Palestinians, despite garnering 45 percent of the vote in the 2006 Gaza election (Anderson 2015, Hasan 2019). Demonization is so pervasive and all-encompassing that even progressive aspects of Israeli society, such as gay rights or ecological movements, are dismissed as mere cover for brutal policies towards Palestinians. As a result, even liberal activists inside Israel must confront not only opposition at home, but internationally organized campaigns against their alleged “pinkwashing” and “homo-nationalism.” When everything and everyone associated with only one nation is deemed evil, demonization is clearly at work.

Double Standards. As these examples show, a variety of double standards are applied to Israel and no other nation (Hirsh 2018, Rosenfeld 2019). We identify five of the most common forms, pertaining to: *salience*, *state foundation*, *state formation*, *self-understanding*, *self-determination* (Arnold 2015).

The double standard of *salience* translates into a political context where the left assigns vastly more attention and importance to the issue of Israel/Palestine than any other conflict in the world today. Israel is one of the few issues that unites a typically fractious left. This one conflict is so central to the U.S. left's self-understanding that it is often a highly visible element even in demonstrations for completely unrelated topics like climate change, police brutality, or gay rights. This ideological omnipresence suggests that the left views Israel as both a unifying factor as well as a political lynchpin upon which various other forms of oppression rest. Yet at the same time, various other occupations, civil wars, and violent conflicts receive little or no attention from the left—there

are no sustained left campaigns targeting other contemporary examples such as India's annexation of Kashmir, Turkey's brutal suppression of the Kurds, Russia's occupation of the Crimea or Iran publicly executing gays. This double standard is even more glaring for North American leftists who target settler colonialism in Israel while directly benefiting from its legacy at home.

The double standard of *state foundation* marks the foundation of Israel alone as artificial and violent, in contrast to the presumably peaceful and "organic" process of establishing other states. Because it calls for an end not only to the occupation but the very existence of Israel, antizionism has come to represent the obvious "radical" position on the left. Yet this radicalism rests on deeply liberal and ahistorical presumptions about the nature of nation-states. It assumes Israel is a uniquely violent exception rather than the more mundane rule. Antizionism selectively ignores that every state in existence today is equally "artificial," birthed and maintained by violence, dispossession, and exclusion.

While the violence that accompanied the foundation of Israel is not unique, the late historical moment (as well as political context) of its establishment is. This brings us to the related double standard of *state formation*, which sees Israel as anachronistic, a colonial and imperial regime engaged in an outmoded form of colonial expansionism. Yet once again, this feature is not unique to Israel. Borders have been continuously redrawn throughout history to create new states. Thirty-four have been founded since 1990 alone, many of which were the result of civil war or land grabs lacking any legal legitimacy, as evident in the ongoing cases of South Sudan and the Western Sahara. Various existing states are also currently engaged in violent territorial expansion and the suppression of local populations – Turkey, India, Russia, Ethiopia, and Morocco, to name a few. State foundation and expansion are frequently accompanied by forced population transfers, yet the demand for the right of return for Palestinians is almost exclusively directed at Israel. Although this has been a persistent sticking point holding up negotiations for Palestinian statehood, it is rarely a condition for other partitioned states, for example India and Pakistan. Left discourse also seldom discusses the treatment of Palestinian refugees by other states like Syria and Egypt, or mentions the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees exiled from neighboring Arab countries in the wake of 1948. None of these examples serve as justification for Israeli crimes or any other occupation; rather the lack of attention and activism around them illustrates a profound double standard operating within left political discourse, one that happens to resonate with historical patterns of antisemitic exceptionalism.

The double standard of *self-understanding* results in criticizing Israel as a specifically ethno-religious state. Yet this position ignores that this fact holds true for several other states today, and for most in history. One would be hard-pressed to find leftists who criticize the specifically Muslim nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Almost every nation in history was at one point linked to a state religion, and as of yet every nation enforces restrictive ethno-racial immigration policies. But it is only the Jewish state that is routinely criticized by the left for its specifically religious character and demographic manipulation. While leftists are right to reject both ethno-religious nationalism and restrictive immigration/demographic policies, they are far from consistent, criticizing some forms -- U.S. and Israel, Christian and Jewish chauvinism -- while ignoring or even rationalizing others -- Islamic nations, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist ethno-religious nationalisms.

Lastly, the double standard of *self-determination* results in acknowledging this right only for Palestinians. A wide variety of movements of Palestinian self-determination are championed by the left – regardless of political content – while Zionism is denounced as synonymous with racism and violence, equally oblivious to specificities of historical form or political content. This holds true more generally for the U.S. left's view of the Israel-Palestine conflict as a whole; although this history is long and complicated, the double standard of self-determination results in an extremely one-sided and simplistic account. Palestinian dispossession and repression is very real, and as the stronger force Israel has the greater power and responsibility to resolve this conflict. At the same time, the left selectively ignores various important historical facts on the other side: that Jews also have historical ties to the region and their own history of displacement; the long subsequent history of persecution, exclusion, oppression, and expulsion, culminating in the Holocaust; that as a result of these historical oppressions Zionism as a national liberation movement and state-building project started late in the game and under historical conditions not of its choosing; the armed attacks on Israel – including civilians – from its inception until the present (Linfield 2019, Memmi 1973).

Despite this complicated history, most leftists primarily perceive Palestinian suffering, fear, and rage as legitimate. At times this translates into support for reactionary groups like Hamas or Hezbollah, despite their fundamentalist politics. By contrast, the feelings of fear, insecurity, and historical persecution among Jewish Israelis are hardly seen as legitimate. The left often portrays the rise of right-wing Palestinian political actors like Hamas as a regrettable but understandable reaction to violence, while

the rise of Likud and Israel's shift to the right are never interpreted as a bad reaction to anti-Semitism and violence against Jews. Although both groups are irredentist and predicated on their opposition to the peace process, the dominant left position is to only acknowledge this regarding Israel, refusing to admit there are those on the other side who will never accept peaceful coexistence with "the Zionist entity." In a conflict where there has been trauma and loss of life on both sides, one does not have to equate the suffering of parties to recognize that resolution is impossible if it only considers the claims of one side.

To review, while antizionism and antisemitism are not necessarily the same thing, they also can be. Simply insisting on the language of antizionism is no guarantee that they do not overlap, as demonstrated by a brief glance at the discourse used by the aforementioned antisemitic "antizionist" neo-Nazis. We have offered the "three D" test as one possible criterion to help distinguish legitimate critiques of Israel from antisemitism, by asking if they rely upon delegitimization, demonization, and double standards. As there are many legitimate grounds to criticize Israeli policy, identifying double standards is an especially useful analytical tool. To this end we have identified five common double standards: *salience*, *state foundation*, *state formation*, *self-understanding*, *self-determination*. The fact that other human rights abusing states – Russia, Iran, China, Turkey, or Saudi Arabia – or settler-colonial societies – the United States, Canada, and Australia – are not held to the same standard of critique denote clear double standards.

Today, antizionism is more than a political position taken towards the Middle East conflict, the rejection of Israel has become a distinctive marker of belonging to the radical left (Hirsh 2016). According to Shulamit Volkov (2006), it has become a form of subcultural badge that declares one is on the right side of history, symbolizing a rejection of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and nationalism, collectively represented by Zionism and embodied in the state of Israel. It has been argued that this shift reflects a deeper crisis of the left that started during the 1960s and continues to the present: a search for revolutionary subjects abroad in the face of increasing powerlessness at home (Gitlin 1993, Postone 2006). Unfortunately, this fixation on the Jewish state as the primary (or secondary after the United States) locus of power and evil in the world reproduces a central trope of antisemitism.

MAKING SENSE OF THE PRESENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LEFT THEORY

Fully explaining the reasons for these positions towards antisemitism within the United States left is beyond the scope of this article, so we can only briefly touch upon them here. However, it is important to stress that, in our analysis, these political patterns *do not stem from conscious and open antisemitism*. We are *not* saying these dynamics are motivated by antisemitic hatred, but are rather the result of unexamined assumptions, myopic political analysis, and, importantly, a genuine but inconsistent concern for the suffering of others. Nevertheless, the result is that the left has set an inordinately high bar for what constitutes antisemitism, in effect defining it out of existence – at least on the left.

The first factor is the, until quite recently, relatively low level of open antisemitism in the United States. This has dramatically changed since 2016, as the Trump presidency has legitimated more brazen forms of racism in general and antisemitism in particular, and as the alt-right and resurgent neo-Nazi movement have begun to visibly target Jews once again (Hawley 2017, Neiwart 2017). Yet until this recent upsurge it was largely understandable that left activists prioritized the far more visible and common forms of anti-black and anti-Arab racism. But as a result, while leftists are generally well aware of how these forms of racism have structured U.S. history, they often remain ignorant of the equally long history of antisemitism in America. This has included residential segregation, employment discrimination, and even lynching (Kerl 2017, Stember 1966). In 1654 Peter Stuyvesant, general director of the Dutch New Amsterdam colony which later became New York City, urged that “the deceitful race” of Jews should not “be allowed to further infect and trouble this new colony” with their “customary usury and deceitful trading with Christians” (Stuyvesant 1654). Almost 200 years later, president Franklin Delano Roosevelt could still state matter-of-factly, “this is a Protestant country, and the Catholics and Jews are here under sufferance” (Pike 1995: 67). Although less visible today, antisemitism has shaped American history (Dinnerstein 1994, Gerber 1986).

The second important factor is the relationship of direct financial and military support that exists between the U.S. and Israel, a bond which is bipartisan but associated especially with the political right. This governmental alliance also aligns with relatively positive attitudes towards Israel within the general population (Gallup 2019). This generally positive governmental orientation towards Israel results in an oppositional position by the left that seeks to challenge these political norms and make the

Palestinian plight more visible, intervening in a conflict supported by their tax dollars. However, this specific relationship can also blind the left to the broader context. It easily misses that strong anti-Israel sentiment in many other places in the world, such as Germany and many Middle Eastern countries, is often fueled by antisemitism. It also often translates into a distorted view of U.S. support which ignores the roles played by other international players and their geopolitical interests. Moreover, it can lead to an inflated sense of the power of “the Israel lobby,” reproducing the notion that an unseen cabal of Jews control the most powerful nation on earth (Walt and Mearsheimer 2006; Chomsky 2006).

The third factor concerns the political actors who address antisemitism in the United States. Generally, the main groups that focus attention on antisemitism are conservative and right-wing organizations or activists, scholars etc. And it is true that these organizations and individuals often enough do respond to any criticism of Israel with accusations of antisemitism (Foxman 2003: 18; Gordon 2013). Yet this perception creates a situation where even groups like the Anti-Defamation League, a human rights organization which “fights anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry” and monitors hate groups, is considered right-wing solely on account of their support for Israel. This political context has created a “boy who cried wolf” situation, where many left activists instinctively distrust allegations of antisemitism or see them only as politically motivated smears. For many on the left, antisemitism has become an almost inherently right-wing issue used to weaken the left.

The prominence and visibility of Holocaust commemoration in the United States, long institutionalized in monuments, text books, and popular culture, is yet another factor. As Shoah commemoration, with its depiction of Americans as the heroic liberators of WWII (Novick 1999), enjoys broad mainstream support, leftists frequently treat it as a political concern that is irrelevant or even counterproductive. This can lead to a “victimhood competition” which falsely imagines that one form of historical commemoration necessarily diminishes the remembrance of forms of other historical oppression, especially the extermination of Native Americans or African slavery. As a result, the painful history of Jewish oppression can be trivialized, or reduced to cynical political manipulation. This is in fact the basic argument of Norman Finkelstein’s book *The Holocaust Industry* (2000), which was also read in some left circles.

The final factor that can blind the American left to antisemitism is the existence of a thriving Jewish community. Jews in the United States can take for granted a relatively safe and stable political environment that does

not exist in many other places. Debates within the Jewish community around the meaning of Jewish identity, social justice, and Israel look and sound very different when transposed into political contexts that do not share the same basic assumptions or face the same threats. The intensity, closeness, and emotional connection to questions of antisemitism and Israel often have very different meanings within Jewish communities that are obscured or overshadowed when these debates take place in other contexts or locations.

These historical and geo-political factors are exacerbated by trends in contemporary left theory. One is the rise of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness as the predominant theoretical concepts for addressing racism (Delgado/Stefancic 2017, Crenshaw et al. 1995). Despite the important contributions of these ideas, their framework of “white privilege” provides no political vocabulary to talk about the oppression of Jews, who can only be understood as privileged white people (Arnold 2015, Taylor 2017). This effectively erases their specific history of domination, and the process of contingent “whiteification” (Brodin 1998, Kivel 1998). But it also overlooks the fact that not all Jews are white or of European origin; Mizrahi and Jews of color face antisemitism as well as anti-black and/or anti-Arab racism.

Another political factor is the prominence, especially since 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, of an anti-imperialist political frame within many parts of the left. This perspective focuses primarily on the power and crimes of the United States and Israel – understood as the heart of global imperialism. Ascendant during the late Sixties New Left, this ideology was often predicated on the supposed impossibility of social change within the United States, viewing both the working and ruling class as bought off by the spoils of racism at home and empire abroad. Much of the left started to pin their hopes on a global struggle of the rest against the West, embodied in third world liberation struggles like those in North Vietnam, Cuba, and Angola. Transforming the role of domestic radicals to fighting imperialism from within the belly of the beast on behalf of movements in other places in turn encouraged an uncritical orientation to even reactionary anti-western movements and discourses (Postone 2006, Hensman 2018, Stoetzler 2018). Thus, many forms of anti-imperialism are frequently oblivious to, or supportive of, the growing power and crimes of new imperialist powers like Russia, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. This binary worldview is also a disguised variety of Orientalism, as it only sees “the rest” in relationship to “the west,” denying all other political actors any real agency and casting them only in the role of eternal victim. This dramatically simplified understanding of power overlooks or demotes

various domestic forms of domination and class exploitation by subordinating them to the primary evil of imperialism.

This variety of crude anti-imperialist politics has become more popular since the attacks of 9/11, and is especially apparent in U.S. left discourse around the Middle East. Political action by Israel is almost always depicted by the left as coldly-calculated, motivated by racist and murderous intent, whereas Palestinian action is presented as an automatic or natural reaction rather than conscious political choice, whether it takes the form of suicide bombing civilians or Hamas' explicit antisemitism. While the left claims that anti-Arab racism constitutes the essence of Zionism, it refuses to acknowledge that antisemitic ideology is one of many factors that influences politics in the Middle East, or is willing to overlook it.

Indeed, anti-imperialism's logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" has created strange political bedfellows: right-wing isolationists and Marxist Leninists; Islamic fundamentalists and queer activists; anarchists and reactionary nationalists (Taylor 2017). As a result, leftists have often tolerated antisemitic positions, or even openly support right-wing political groups. The feminist queer theorist Judith Butler provided one example in 2006 when she claimed that "understanding Hamas and Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, on the left, part of a global left, is extremely important" (Butler 2006). For many, these group's "anti-imperialist" opposition to Israel overrides their stated ideological of hostility towards Jews, queers, and women.

Certain modes of criticizing capitalism can offer another theoretical opening to antisemitism (Battini 2019, Fine and Spencer 2017). Populist and conspiratorial critiques of capitalism attack only one aspect of capitalism – finance, interest, greed – as if these were possible without the allegedly "good" side of capitalism. This ignores core characteristics like exploitation, competition, and private property. Such critiques personalize capitalism by targeting bankers or individual firms, treating the problems of capitalism as moral rather than systemic while ignoring the structural forces which compel ruthless competition among capitalists. By focusing on corruption, greed, and other personal failings, this narrative suggests that the solution is simply eliminating the few "bad apples" which spoil the bunch. Historically, these bad apples have frequently been identified as Jews. Occupy Wall Street's vague populist frames of the 99% versus the 1% and "Main Street" versus "Wall Street" allowed for mass identification with the movement, but it also left it open to right-wing and antisemitic interpretations, both of which had small presences on the fringes of the movement.

While the various historical, political, and theoretical factors described

above attempt to contextualize and explain the particularities of left discourse on antisemitism in the United States, they neither excuse nor rationalize them. The patterns, dynamics, subtle double standards, and not-so-subtle violent outbursts of antisemitism are all too real, as is the left's continued reluctance to address it as a problem. This makes it a challenge left social movements and thinkers must seriously confront.

THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF IGNORING – AND CHALLENGING – ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT

Before concluding, let us first avoid persistent confusions by reiterating what we are *not* saying: that antisemitism is the worst or most pressing form of oppression today; that the left is a hotbed of rabid antisemites; that any and all criticism of Israel is antisemitic. Instead, we are suggesting antisemitism remains an “invisible prejudice” for much of the contemporary left. We suggest this is due to two main reasons; first, when it does occasionally surface, its articulation is not generally explicit, but rather takes coded and fragmented forms. Second, it is a form of racism that cannot be addressed – the left lacks the conceptual tools and political will to do so. As previously noted, we do *not* believe this is the result of antisemitic intent but rather unexamined assumptions, faulty political analysis, and social pressure to conform to left conventional wisdom. Nonetheless, the various political blind spots, peculiar bedfellows, and double standards we have addressed stand out by the uncommon prominence, tolerance, and emotional weight the left assigns them.

These dynamics have real political consequences. In many cases, it becomes impossible for Jews and allies to talk about antisemitism, especially without being accused of apologism for Zionism. Many Jews state that they feel they are allowed into the left only if they publicly espouse a commitment to antizionism, and are ethnically singled out for a political loyalty test. The Revolutionary Communist Party magazine is explicit: “Jewish people who resent being resented for Israel's crimes... need to loudly and unequivocally speak out against Israel's crimes” (Goodman 2010). This formulation holds Jewish Americans responsible for Israeli state policy, while also blaming the victim by implying that Jews deserve racism unless they take action against Israel. Similar suggestions that Arabs and Muslims be singled out for symbolic statements of loyalty would never be condoned on the left; when the right makes this demand, it is rightly condemned as racist. Yet this is a common complaint from Jewish leftists. At times this leads to actual expulsion, as it did at the Chicago Dyke March, but more frequently it takes subtler forms of day-

to-day pressure and threat within left spaces. Since according to opinion polls 70 percent of American Jews believe that “caring about Israel is an important part of my being a Jew,” in practice this means disqualifying the vast majority of American Jews from participating in the left (American Jewish Committee 2018).

We also suggest that these attitudes reflect the relative weakness of the left today. Moishe Postone (2006) argues that the contemporary radical left – delegitimized, powerless, and lacking a viable revolutionary agent akin to the working class – has abandoned its utopian aspirations and been reduced to passively cheering for or against other states or movements. With the possibility of progressive social change seemingly off the table, many leftists have proven willing to embrace any form of “resistance” to capitalism, the U.S., or Israel, regardless of their politics. This “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” logic often projects its own values onto actors that do not share them or simply endorses reactionary political aims.⁶

This makes confronting antisemitism an important task for rebuilding an emancipatory left. What, concretely, does this task require? First, deeper forms of analysis – of capitalism, racism, global politics, and the Middle East – which accurately understand the complexities of the contemporary social world, and which can offer a liberatory political vision that distinguishes its critiques from those of conspiracists, nationalists, theocrats, and antisemites. It entails being aware of our immediate political context and its historical specificities, but also keeping in mind the different context and histories found elsewhere – including current political developments like rising antisemitism in Europe and the Arab world. We must revise and update our analysis of racism, and acknowledging that many of our inherited concepts have little to say about antisemitism. Although there is a rich literature on the subject, most of the left are unfamiliar with left theorists and historians of antisemitism such as Michele Battini, Werner Bonefeld, Ellen Willis, Robert Fine, Moishe Postone, or the work of the Frankfurt School. This requires ongoing educational work including workshops, forums, panel discussion, and publications. It calls for increased awareness of contemporary antisemitic violence and discourse, demonstrating solidarity with its victims, and launching new political campaigns which proactively address

⁶ One example of this naïve type of coalition-building: in 2010 Iran President Ahmadinejad met in NYC with over 100 activists from the peace movement – including Code Pink, religious groups, independent media organizations, and Palestinian groups in New York under the banner of creating peace between the people of the U.S. and Iran. None of these left groups in attendance bothered to criticize Iran's human rights violations or his open antisemitism, baffling and enraging many Iranian left groups.

antisemitism.

Most crucially, it requires making antisemitism a topic the left takes seriously. The recent wave of antisemitic violence and speech has sparked some long-overdue discussion on the left. In 2017 Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) produced “Understanding Antisemitism,” a primer on antisemitism from a left movement perspective (JFREJ 2017). Other groups and outlets have started to discuss the topic and at times pointed out the left’s silence (Ward 2017, Bovy 2017). Yet much of the renewed attention still focuses exclusively on the right, or replicates the same problems described here. This includes the Jewish Voice for Peace anthology *On Antisemitism* (2017), featuring essays by antizionist activists not scholars of antisemitism. It focuses on the Christian and racial antisemitism of the political right, and gives ample space to Islamophobia, but says little about forms found on the left. And while it devotes a third of the book to “fighting false charges of antisemitism,” it refuses to consider that criticism of Israel can ever be antisemitic. This approach ensures the left will be vigilant towards the antisemitism of its enemies, but not of its friends.

As with past struggles to confront racism, both within the left and in society at large, it will be a difficult process that involves challenging basic assumptions and disrupting received political categories. But ultimately this process is a rewarding and necessary one. Any left worth the name must demonstrate its commitment to uprooting all forms of racism and domination; confronting the current invisibility of antisemitism can only make it stronger.

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Book review: Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 2019. ISBN-13: 978-1517903596 (paperback). 208 pages. \$19.95.

Reviewed by Shane Burley¹

The role of transracialized narratives in the development of contemporary conspiracy theories is ubiquitous, though often ignored as part of the larger continuum of racialized discourses. In reviewing the new book *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, Shane Burley unpacks the use of underlying narratives that developed in a racialized context and have expanded beyond their original usage. To do this he analyzes the key arguments of the original text and applies them to the world of conspiracy theories, which evolved from anti-Semitic scripts and, while often erasing their specific focus on Jews, maintain the same ideological threads. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS: Producerism, Anti-Semitism, Patriot Movement, Militia Movement, Public Employee Unions, Conspiracy Theories.

INTRODUCTION

When I first pulled up to Zuccotti Park the camp's culture was in flux, which, in large part, was because of the sprinkling of frost from the first sub-freezing mornings of the year. In November of 2011, just a month after Occupy Wallstreet began, we thought the real test of the movement was how outdoor living would play in a New York winter. But as people started opening their tents, bustling about to the food table, a small

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entourage started running to a street corner where some lingering news cameras had started gathering around a lone person waving a sign. Standing in front of the famed golden bull statue was a man holding a placard that read “Google: Jewish Billionaires.” He was not new, he had been lingering for days, and over the next several hours people found clever ways to try and block his messaging. (Though he still got in photo after photo, article after article, and some tourists took selfies with him.)²

This wasn’t that much of a surprise. The Occupy Wallstreet Movement was rightfully exciting. The class anger of the 2007-8 financial crash was crystallizing into a true mass movement, warts and all. Like any real large conglomeration of people, organizers had a total inability to demand any kind of ideological uniformity from participants. And that was the point. Any movement that derives its praxis from its size has to compromise on the clarity of its vision. The general point of agreement was that capitalism, as we are experiencing it now, has gone astray, and that there is an elite financial class with undue power in comparison to the rest of us. Within that left populist framework, however, a different narrative started to creep in, one that was less critical of capitalism itself than it was of the specific people they suspected were pulling the strings. Sometimes these were shadowy “elites,” unnamed and unseen, sometimes it was families with familiar last names, which often start with “R.” And, at the bottom of this reverse pyramid, the named enemies were just Jews.

So I wasn’t surprised to see someone ranting about Jewish bankers at Occupy, and the overt antisemitism was swiftly dealt with, but it was the residue it left that turned my stomach. Open “naming of the Jew” was not allowed, but the “big tent” that had been formed permitted almost all other manifestations of the same story. Cabals, secret agendas, the particular degeneracy of finance capital, rootless cosmopolitans, the shadow government, and, of course, Zionism, were always there, always an acceptable objection in our ideological confederation. It wasn’t that antisemites had come in and consciously influenced the direction (they certainly tried, with more or less success), but that our disparate ideas about late capitalism, the critiques being utilized in an increasingly complicated social movement, had deeply laid narratives that transcended their original overt antisemitism, but maintained much of that antisemitism’s fundamental character. The Jewish conspiracy remained

² This led to a string of “what aboutisms” in news coverage correlating this moment of antisemitism to racism at the Tea Party. There was no comparison. Joseph Berger, “Cries of Anti-Semitism, but Not at Zuccotti Park,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-criticized-for-flashes-of-anti-semitism.html>.

even if the Jews had been plucked out. And as the movement continued to struggle with their vision of exactly what the problems in capitalism are (and what the solution could be), these narratives acted as a virus, infecting discourse, confusing responsibility, and maintaining a mythology about power that has been used for centuries to pass the blame for misfortune from the class responsible to a people who shall not be named (or who shall dwell alone).

WHAT'S IN A NARRATIVE?

One of the most common courses of discussion on the contemporary, post-Reagan American left is why the working class works against its own interests. Books like Thomas Frank's liberal classic *What's the Matter with Kansas?* contrasts rural America's past orientation with the socialist party with its current status as a bastion of conservatism, even when the free-market economics it professes is primarily at odds with the working class's own conditions of economic decline.³ The neoliberal policies favored by conservative politicians are founded on meritocratic narratives that, while appealing to a rugged identity for rural and blue-collar workers, leaves them with dismal prospects. The attacks on labor unions, farm subsidies that support massive agribusiness rather than family farms, the disinvestment in rural social services, and the general dismantling of the Keynesian social safety nets all statistically hurt rural and blue-collar workers the most, while often leaving urban liberals professionals intact (more or less). So why do these voters line up around the block to support the politicians that disenfranchise them?

Frank's work is within such a narrow framework that it actually misses the mark. The question we should be asking ourselves is not why they vote against their own interests, but why do we adopt entire modes of thought that serve only to victimize people like ourselves. It could simply be reduced to political tribalism, and that is certainly a factor, but there are large questions about how narratives that dictate who is to blame can rob us of the ability to really identify the responsible parties.

From the late 19th century onward we can safely say that the West has entered an era of "mass politics," meaning a period in which the large mass of people is invited to participate in some fashion in the political process. In the era of fixed monarchies, justified in the "divine right of kings," there was little currency in a mediated opinion on the current state of things.

³ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

Revolts, riots, revolutions, all happened in opposition to the existing political order, rarely within it, but today we have a range of political ideologies meant to help someone realize their best version of what we have now. Democracy is the vessel; ideas are the path to perfection.⁴

EATING FROM A TRASHCAN CALLED IDEOLOGY

This has, likewise, led away from politics purely as self-interest and into an era of nuanced positions, one where the interests of a particular class of people are rarely understood with uniformity. Instead, the ruling institutions of capital are able to influence modes of thought that reframe what is important in political decision making, to recontextualize who has agency in political turmoil, and supplant class identity and antagonisms with competing identities, each with their own set of motivating values. While the nominal institutional left held much of the working class up through the 1960s (I am not suggesting this is any kind of monolith), the shift towards the popularity of social conservatism and the mobilization of the Moral Majority and other Republican vessels utilized latent bigotries to combine them into a single political thought. The incoherence inherent in William F. Buckley's formulation of conservatism was now seen as a natural and normal, as though conservative Christianity, free market economics, and aggressive foreign policy all were perfect bedfellows.⁵ As with most eras of class struggle, bigotry was again used to replace class solidarity, and narratives that had existed for centuries were re-engaged so that people would gain complicity in their own subjugation.⁶ The poor worker then bought into detrimental narratives about poverty, even if it meant that it would take them down as well.

It is exactly this framework that Joe Lowndes and Daniel Martinez HoSang's new book *Producers, Parasites, Patriots* attempts to understand more fully, re-approaching this dynamic in a contemporary period of rising national populism, Trumpism, and the mobilization of the political far-right. The book does this by centering a particularly strong narrative

⁴ This is one of the elements that really allows for the existence of a mass reactionary movement moved through populism, such as fascism, and one of the elements that makes fascism a uniquely modern construct since it requires the mass participation of people and could not have been possible in an era before politics was a system of mass (if coerced) political participation. Shane Burley, *Fascism Today: What It Is and How to End It* (Chico: AK Press, 2017).

⁵ George Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 24-27.

⁶ Shane Burley, "When They Bought Us Out," *Gods & Radicals*, September 4, 2018, <https://godsandraddicals.org/2018/09/04/when-they-bought-us-out/>.

dynamic, that of ‘parasites’ and that of ‘producers.’ Parasites are introduced as a specifically racial narrative about black people used to create mass white complicity with slavery and later eras of white supremacist subjugation and apartheid. Black people are portrayed as parasites by nature, which the whites have to take responsibility for through mass oppressive violence, for the protection of both white and black people.

Whites, by contrast, are “producers,” they make civilization while black people only feed off of it through a supposed naturally occurring binary. This image has allowed the creation of a white labor aristocracy, one founded in continually offering white labor a marked advantage and thereby reinforcing the myth of white producerism since the conditions for white success and black codependence were reproduced through force.⁷

The racialized categories of the “producer,” the “parasite,” and the “patriot” have long been deployed to do this work, differentiating those groups deemed self-reliant, autonomous, and worthy of social protection from those who are dependent, debased, and worthy of abandonment and disavowal.⁸

Patriots are then the people that look at the success and failure of the system and accept them, they protect and defend the institutions while denying the implicit stratification they produce.

This is a well understood dynamic that is fostered by capital, including early on by plantation owners, who intend to maintain their financial hegemony by destroying the class solidarity of white and black workers.⁹ White workers were economically harmed by the slave labor that suppressed their wages, yet they were bought off with cultural, institutional, and social superiority.¹⁰ They were never able to create

⁷ J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat from Mayflower to Modern* (Oakland: PM Press and Kersblebedeb, 2014).

⁸ Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 4.

⁹ This has become a heavily exploited narrative in recent years to raise the profile of poor whites as perhaps equal sufferers of oppression to chattel slaves, an absurd comparison. While slavery suppressed the bargaining power of white workers, their complicity in this institutions allowed it to proliferate and this dichotomy continues to benefit white workers in immediate ways. Cynical attempts to deny this existing racial stratification and white supremacy should be rejected.

¹⁰ Edna Bonacich. "Abolition, the Extension of Slavery, and the Position of Free Blacks: A Study of Split Labor Markets in the United States, 1830-1863." *American Journal of Sociology* 81, no. 3 (1975): 601-28. www.jstor.org/stable/2777646.

multiracial organizations strong enough to fight for a repositioning of the economy, and instead were allowed to exist as a privileged caste of workers rather than toppling the system of economic stratification.¹¹ Stoking racism within the class is the oldest tool used by a ruling class bent on destroying unions, social movements, and resistance, and it is often done by creating (or reinforcing) a narrative about who, in a given situation, produces something, and who is a parasite on those who are productive.

That producer/parasite dynamic was presented in specifically racial terms, but as time progressed and movements to undermine explicit white supremacy changed how racial caste can be publicly expressed in America, the narrative continued to exist in a less obviously racialized form. It is this particular narrative that *Producers, Parasites, Patriots* jumps on, the (somewhat) deracialized producer/parasite dynamic that was originally created to disenfranchise black people.

Any society “structured in dominance” requires a shared basis of comprehending and reproducing distinctions of merit and stigma, autonomy and dependency, and authority and dispossession. Within the United States, conceptualizations of race have always provided a legitimating vocabulary and grammar. The value afforded to various categories of labor (honorable or degraded), the status of capital (heroic or parasitic), and the relationship forged between state and market all depend upon such distinctions. Claims about dependency, autonomy, and freedom have always been constructed through racialized and gendered meaning and references. Thus, as we demonstrate, even when these claims are used to stigmatize groups of largely white workers, race still performs important political labor, as the hierarchical taxonomies of capitalism continue to be constituted through racialized distinctions and meanings.¹²

They identify this process as “racial transposition” to describe “a process through which the meaning, valence, and significance of race can be transferred from one context, group, or setting to another,” such as transposing anti-blackness onto later categorical construction like “public employee.”¹³ The introduction of the book does an incredible amount of

¹¹ K Merrit. (2017). Introduction: The Second Degree of Slavery. In *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge Studies on the American South, pp. 1-37). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹² HoSang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 10.

¹³ Ibid, 12.

labor to lay out this concept in less than twenty pages, and the rest of the book sets out to see how this narrative has reshaped social and political relationships in contemporary America.

While the original narrative was explicitly racialized, it now works to separate classes of workers along different, and often more complicated, social fissures. The book makes the point, largely implicitly, that the continuance of the narrative has a consistently negative effect on those who often perpetuate the narrative, such as poor whites maintaining negative views of unions and social programs that could help them if they had not been summarily destroyed.

The first chapter makes this incredibly clear by jumping into the attack on public employee unions, the perception of which has changed dramatically over the past thirty years of right-wing political and corporate attacks. Civil servants were once seen with almost universal acclaim, but the producer/parasite narrative has now been employed in a less-racialized way to present public employees as leeches on a welfare state, while private sector employees are actually producing something for the economy. Public employee unions are today the strongest sector of the labor movement, with unionized public employees making up around 33.9% of the market compared to the 6.4% of private sector unionization as of 2018.¹⁴ Stories about lazy or incompetent public employees has for years create the political impetus to attack public employee compensation, and public employee unions are regularly blamed for various state and local government fiscal crisis that are largely the result of conservative tax policy. This has allowed organizations like FreedomWorks, the Right to Work Legal Foundation, and the Freedom Foundation to grow as conservative “charities,” presenting themselves as legitimate ideological fixtures rather than tools to undermine the wages of public employees so as to increasingly transfer wealth to the upper classes.¹⁵ This project has been aided by the fact that union members are more likely to be of African descent, and those unions are largely responsible for moving many communities of color into the middle class, a point of which that helps cement their image as parasites in the mind of the conservative mass public.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Union Members - 2018." U.S. Department of Labor, press release, January 18, 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>, accessed November 23, 2019.

¹⁵ Moshe Z. Marvit, "For 60 Years, This Powerful Conservative Group Has Worked to Crush Labor, *The Nation*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/group-turned-right-work-crusade-crush-labor/>.

¹⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Union Members - 2018." U.S. Department of Labor, press

The image of public employees, particularly those without “heroic” jobs like firefighters or teachers, has allowed them to become political punching bags. This move has a particular effect, however. Labor federations like the AFL-CIO and labor councils are often made up of primarily public sector unions since they have the largest membership, and those institutions provide support both for other labor and trade unions as well as a range of issues that affect the lives of working people. Unionization provides economic growth and wage stability for non-union workers as well, and it is clear that an increase in union membership and bargaining ability helps blue collar and middle income workers across the board. Policies like “Right to Work” or the anti-union legislation that decimated public employee unions in Wisconsin have had a disastrous effect on people in middle income and blue collar positions, yet those are still constituencies that have continued to support the attacks on public employee unions. This discourages workers from active unionization, or supporting union representation in their own jobs, a trend that is established through this ideological mechanism of scapegoating union employees and is backed up by the lack of personal experience most workers now have with unions.¹⁷ This has a disastrous effect on the majority of wage-earning people, both in destroying the opportunities for union represented employment and generally harming all workers given the positive impact that unions have on income inequality, workplace safety provisions, and left-leaning socio-economic policies. This producer./parasite narrative then buys a portion of the class into a political movement against their own interests as a sharp decline in unions and increased restrictions on things like collective bargaining rights, resulting from the political advocacy associated with this narrative trend, harms them economically.¹⁸ The producer/parasite dynamic has then shifted the public’s perception in a way by inspiring some working people to declare war on the very unions that have provided them measurable workplace and

release, January 18, 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>, accessed November 23, 2019.

¹⁷ Studies have shown that public employee support for unions often come from workplace issues when they are in union workplaces, which could suggest that the presence of a union aids in thinking about workplace issues in an organizing context or through class identification. For non-union employees, attitudes about unions tend to stem from more cultural influences, and therefore these narratives of parasitism union employees could have more salience, impact, and influence on choices to avoid unionization. Smith, Russell L., and Anne H. Hopkins. "Public Employee Attitudes toward Unions." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 32, no. 4 (1979): 492-495.

¹⁸ Kerrissey, Jasmine. "Collective Labor Rights and Income Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 80, no. 3 (2015): 626-53.

economic stability.

Lowndes and HoSang then move to open up this discussion even further, including how black constituencies have been included in civic nationalist discourse, particularly in criticizing multiculturalism in black conservative political circles, despite the nature of that discourse having been forged through black subjugation. The discourse is reframed from explicit racial terms to coded nativist racial terms such as immigration, framing “real Americans” as producers and immigrants as a parasitical class coming to exploit our welfare system. This model is more correctly named as xenophobia, broad fear of others that is racialized and imbued with “foreignness” that can be expressed as a difference in religion, cultural customs, or values.¹⁹ While this does not explicitly name race, and a marginalized racial group have some level of participation, it continues to reinforce racial thinking that will help maintain their oppression. Black conservatives have then been invited to participate in their own disenfranchisement if we look at it in material, rather than ideological, terms.

One of the areas that makes *Producers, Parasites, Patriots* stand out is that it walks an incredibly important line by refusing to deny accountability for white workers. While it discusses how previously racialized narratives are now being weaponized against white workers, it never makes the mistake of assuming that the white workers are in an equally marginalized situation as their non-white counterparts. It instead focuses on the necessity of white working class participation in antiracist movements by discussing how they share in the harmful effects of white supremacy, and offers up a militant antiracism that is made of solidarity rather than moralism. It never loses sight of the reality that workers of color are in a profoundly different spot than white workers, and is able to make its point about the nature of universalized racial scripts without denying the fact that white workers still see marked advantages through white supremacy and actively participate in the subjugation of people of color.²⁰

¹⁹ Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 1-16.

²⁰ As I wrote this review Noel Ignatiev, the founder of the journal *Race Traitor* and author of the book *How the Irish Became White* passed away, and I find much of his critique of whiteness in the pages of *Parasite, Producers, Patriots*. This theoretical version of white privilege traces through institutions like the Sojourner Truth Organization and the later Bring the Ruckus, and focuses on a mix of white accountability and agency in radical anti-racism. One of the key points in *Parasites, Producers, Patriots* is how white workers were ultimately harmed by white supremacist narratives, which broke up their ability to change their underlying situation through

The book's frame of reference is around the patriot militias, the hard right edges of the GOP, and the conservative black constituencies, and as such focuses on the parasite narratives that are most prescient to American political mobilizations: social service recipients, public employees, immigrants, the federal government, and so on. This format of transracialized narrative is a unique ideological commitment to blaming the most marginalized, but it is only one of many transracialized narratives that use racial scripts beyond their original formulation to destabilize political agency.

ROTHSCHILDS, BANKERS, TRILATERALS

The book is specifically about how anti-blackness informs narratives beyond their original function, but it sets up a model for how to look at other scripts that began as explicitly racialized narratives and then evolved to become more coded, and thereby more diffuse in their application of harm. Where this structure of deracializing racial scripts also unpacks dominant political feelings is around antisemitism, particularly as the motivating Rosetta Stone of the broad range of conspiracy theories. Antisemitism and conspiracy theories of almost all stripes are intricately linked, sharing a common ancestral DNA so complete that antisemitism itself can accurately be called the source of modern conspiracy theories.

Antisemitism has functioned differently than other forms of racism, both systemic and interpersonal, as antisemitism has often focused on a host of religious and social practices that vary between the Jewish community and their surrounding country, as well as their universal experience as a minority without a larger nation state.²¹ Jews were then assumed to be acting as agents without loyalty to the "host country," which created suspicion about their intentions and activities, an alien people with an alien religion and alien interests. This created the most persistent narrative about Jewish behavior: that it is in their interest to attack the Gentile populations so as to stabilize their own position. This has gone through various versions, beginning as primarily religious persecution during eras like the Spanish Inquisition, where Christian conversation was an (incomplete) antidote, to the explicitly racialized antisemitism of the

cross-racial organizing and by having those same narratives used in their own dispossession. I'm sure Ignatiev would have agreed. Jarrod Shanahan, "Noel Ignatiev, 1940-2019," *Commune*, communemag.com/noel-ignatiev-1940-2019/.

²¹ It should go without saying that "different" does not imply "more severe" than other types of racism, just that it functions differently.

late 19th and early 20th century, culminating in the Holocaust. The narratives about the nefarious Jewish nature was transposed from their religion to their biology, with their religion being a manifestation of their internal genetic scripts, applying pseudoscientific extrapolations often used to racialize perceived personality types and social behaviors.²² A variety of effects were then applied to supposed Jewish activity, ranging from blame for anything that happened to Gentile children to financial crisis to the eventual rise of Marxism. Jews were out to destroy proper national identity since they were a people without a state, and they did this through communism, or capitalism, or materialism, or postmodernism, or whatever ideology that the antisemitic idea makers determined was the Achilles Heel of the folk.

As antisemitism became less and less publicly acceptable the logic of the Jewish conspiracy theory shifted outward beyond Jewish identity. The internal coherence of an antisemitic conspiracy theory holds that a small Jewish population, a cabal, is controlling world events for the benefit of themselves. They do this by using crypsis so that the host population does not know their true intentions, and therefore they use their internal structures to undermine what are obviously the true values that make a nation successful. The notion that a secret group is using trickery to destroy important institutions, ranging from national identity to the organs of democracy, is the core of the antisemitic conspiracy theory, and the functioning logic that has been moved out of the world of explicit antisemitism and into the broader world of populist politics.²³ In an era of

²² This is the founding principle of the work of Kevin MacDonald, a white nationalist evolutionary psychologist who has become the central theorist of contemporary anti-Semitism. He argues that Judaism is a “group evolutionary strategy” that Jews use to outcompete non-Jews for resources by developing eugenic practices of intermarriage and manipulating ideologies of Western nations so as to destabilize their national interests in an effort to raise the socio-economic status of Jews. His explanation has become the new standard anti-Semitic script for almost all white nationalists. Kevin MacDonald, *A People Who Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy, with Diaspora Peoples* (iUniverse, 2002).

²³ A distinction should be made between the conspiratorial narrative and the class narrative presented in the radical left. The cabal of the conspiracy theory are specifically not just an economic ruling class, primarily because acting in class interest is understood without the covert nature of the conspiracy. The conspiratorial measures have to benefit a particular group of people not defined purely by class position, but by a different metric, one that society may no longer have a common narrative for. For Jews, this is that they benefit in terms of their *ethnic interests*, a type of interest that modern society (supposedly) has no place for. This also should not negate the fact that state and capital utilize conspiracies as a basic practice of operating. The conspiracy theory discussed here are intended to be understood as *extraordinary* to most people’s understanding of how

mass politics, populism is the anti-elitist mass movement of the people, both right and left, that seeks to challenge dominant institutions by feeding on guttural rage about the problems implicit in the current system. Because the populism is anti-elitist and built from a range of class and economic positions, this means that it drives towards emotional narratives that are not reliant on a deep understanding of history, politics, and the social sciences, and therefore is not always bound to reasoned political evidence to drive understanding of world events.²⁴ Instead the populism can go both left and right, and instead simply presents the contrast of “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” that moves beyond simple politics and instead into a psychological script that can motivate mass action.²⁵

Conspiracy theories have then flourished as the culture’s impulse to blame the cabal, to separate and identify the Jews or other minorities viewed as alien, has continued and influenced the national discourse in profound way. The way the conspiratorial cabal is viewed has changed as the political language of the West has changed, but the fundamental structure remains the same.

The clearest example of this has been in the vague application of “bankers” as the orchestrators of social ill, or, more specifically, particular banking families, such as the Rothschilds or Rockefellers. The Marxist critique on the centralized power of the bourgeois ruling class would likewise highlight a class antagonism between the large mass of workers and the mentioned banking families, but there is a particular difference that makes an antisemitic conspiracy script stray from this formulation. Marxism and left social theory look at the particular actors in the ruling class as acting in accordance with class interests composed by the system. Plainly put, this means that rich people work to enhance their wealth, which is generally understood to be at the cost of the working classes who are exploited through their wage labor or other forms of accumulated capital such as housing costs, institutional fee gauging, and the veritable costs of not controlling capital. This is the result of the system, capitalism, that favors a few and allows those few to control the rules of the game.

In the early 1980s-1990s, as the militia movement was starting to explode and the Christian radical right was in ascendancy, this rhetoric of de-Judaized conspiracy mongering became the norm. Figures like Pat

institutions operate, not the conspiracies that have been generally understood and passively accepted as the way our world operations.

²⁴ Shane Burley, *Fascism Today: What It Is and How to End It* (Chico: AK Press, 2017), 50-51.

²⁵ Cas Mudde, *The Far-Right in America* (London and New York: Routledge Focus, 2018), 2.

Robertson railed against the “New World Order,” citing explicit antisemitic authors as credible sources of authority while refusing to own up the antisemitic content itself. This flourished around the militia movement, where the Christian Identity factions associated with Aryan Nations continued to be pushed out, but where the broad features of their Millenarian and conspiratorial worldview remained. This served as what Michael Barkun described as a “bridging mechanism,” that would help move people from comfortable areas of the Conservative Movement (or other political ideologies, for that matter) to the world of explicit racialist extremist movements²⁶. These narratives act as a weigh station, conditioning the convert to this line of thinking and setting the stage for Jews to take the prime role as the agents of doom. These conspiracy theories build up the perfect outline of the Jew, the secret group pulling the strings, and that transition can become seamless. This de-racialization process helped to lean the radical right more towards the GOP, in particular as radical right-wing politicians rode into office in the early to mid-1990s at the same time as the Montana Freeman were declaring war on the Federal Government and the militias were in revolt over Ruby Ridge, Waco, and the Brady gun control bill.

The conspiracy narrative, by contrast, leaves the system relatively untouched because the issue is not systemic, it is personal.²⁷ The conspiracy narrative suggests that it is a *particular* family whose motivations are more nefarious than that of any ruling class family acting out the roles prescribed by their class status. Likewise, the assumption is that they behave in ways extraordinary and secretive *beyond* what is understood as common behavior in the socio-economic ruling classes. The conspiracy narrative then sees a shrinking set of actors who use soft power, the power to manipulate and coerce people to follow their bidding, rather than hard power, the ability to enforce directives through open control such as explicit violence or financial directive.²⁸ The conspiracy narrative then relies on the notion that the system itself could function fairly if not for the nefarious actors at the center who manipulate things for their own interests and extract value from the otherwise pristine mass populace. The

²⁶ Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 285-290.

²⁷ Werner Bonefeld.. 2019. ‘Critical Theory and the Critique of Antisemitism: On Society as Economic Object’. *Journal for Social Justice*, current issue.

²⁸ This plays into the global shift in far-right national populist politics that suggests that many people are rejecting towards the social control of soft power in favor of the explicit authoritarian leadership of hard power. This argument could present a framework to discuss why “strong man” leadership is increasingly preferred even when, as talked about earlier, it could be detrimental to those supporting that form of leadership.

narrative can exist on multiple scales, from small regional issues to international finance and governance, but the pattern remains. A small group, bound together by something beyond modern socio-economic systems, manipulate a neutral system in their favor using crypsis.

What Lowndes and HoSang have done is not only single out how scripts functions in less racialized forms, they also draw out its consequences to the population who is actually perpetuating the narrative itself. Conspiracy theories present a harmful paradigm right from the start by undermining the ability for collective struggle against the conditions of oppression. This comes from a presentation of the actors as “all powerful,” it creates a false perception about how the institutions and systems actually work, it confuses who is responsible for the primary issues, and it shifts back blame onto people that are likewise marginalized by the complex social constructs that are at play.

The conspiracy theory is a “monological belief system” that helps to simplify the narrative about cause and consequence, while also streamlining the moral implications of the issue. It is much easier to identify particular actors than look at the whole complexity of the system, which creates massive social inequalities and whose unjust nature is systematically enforced.²⁹ This forces an understanding of the problems without a revolutionary perspective; a false consciousness about who and what is responsible for social ills, diverting it away from the structural causes that require radical transformations.

This has been particularly true in the national populist conspiracy theory circles in the periphery of the Donald Trump 2016 Presidential campaign and what came later, who, despite citing economic fears as a motivating issue, supported a controversial wealthy businessman. The legitimate anger over the effects of neoliberal policy was diverted by working class voters to a political class who, in the end, just helped to maintain the power of the powerful.

The conspiracy theory itself is a populist political meta-narrative, one that is determinedly more common in popular discourse than it is in institutions of social and political record. It is essentially the folk study of world events from common people, often informed by underlying social scripts. Likewise, they hold what Richard Landes labels as “hidden scripts,” where by the expression of these hidden truths, prohibited by official records, creates a captive audience who experiences this form of discourse as revelatory and destabilizing to the established order.³⁰ They

²⁹ Ted Goertzel. "Belief in Conspiracy Theories." *Political Psychology* 15, no. 4 (1994): 740-741.

³⁰ Richard Landes. "THE JEWS AS CONTESTED GROUND IN POSTMODERN

are pure representations of the search for grand narratives and the inherent distrust in the elite caste, yet they refuse to go the distance of questioning the institutional roles themselves.³¹ This relies on a model in search of outsiders, people who are flawed in intentions and who pervert the system's inherently neutral roles. Capitalism, statecraft, globalization, and other social forces are seen to lack agency and instead are affected only by the nefariousness of individuals. It could be assumed then that a pure person, who lacked unaccountable allegiances, would be able to manifest the functional legitimacy of these institutions. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and outsiders with alien interests are at the helm. The Jew is then one of the "ultimate outsiders" to Christian civilization, at least historically, and conspiracism's long memory will often connect back to these early narratives of dual loyalty.³² The real narrative, that rich people control social systems to maintain their wealth, is not complex enough to conspiracy theorists explain the confusing world we are trying to make sense of.

As the American right stakes its claim on white anxiety around non-white immigration, the narrative surrounding racial and religious outsiders is even more present, even when the narrative is deracialized on its surface. Now it uses "dog whistles" to effectively communicate the same narratives about Jewish conspiracies, yet it also hides behind plausible deniability.

These are how some of the most popular and prevalent conspiracies of the Trump era operate. Q Anon, which erupted from the offensive web forum 8Chan, posits that Donald Trump is secretly the savior of the American people, but the entrenched bureaucracy of the "Deep State" is running counter to his efforts to kick out the evildoers and pedophiles. Pizzagate used rudimentary conspiracy charting to assert that those associated with Hilary Clinton are a part of a child sex trafficking ring and satanic religious order based in the Washington D.C. pizza parlor, Cosmic Pizza. Both of these create outrageous narratives, more complicated and less verifiable than most ideological narratives, making them almost impossible to disprove since they are fundamentally disconnected from reality. In both of these, images of the endangered child are used to drum up an emotional reaction and harken to the days when child blood sacrifice was ascribed to Jewish religious rituals.³³ Alex Jones and *Infowars* have

CONSPIRACY THEORY." *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19, no. 3/4 (2007): 10.

³¹ Ibid, 12.

³² Henry L. Feingold. "Finding a Conceptual Framework for the Study of American Antisemitism." *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, 1985, pp. 313.

³³ Nina Burleigh, "#Pizzagate Resurfaces an Old Anti-Semitic Slander," *Newsweek*, December 6, 2016, www.newsweek.com/pizzagate-resurfaces-anti-semitic-slander

created a cottage industry of peddling outlandish claims, all of which are intended to reframe the responsible parties away from a Marxist and leftist critiques of capitalism and back towards a nefarious cabal that behave for extraordinary reasons, sometimes satanic, sometimes pedophilic, and sometimes totalitarian, but never fully visible and understood through a reasoned analysis of social systems.

The conspiracy theory also ensures material instability in the communities in which it supplants the proven narrative, creating real world results. The massive increase in preventable illnesses in the U.S., particularly around childhood diseases like the Measles, are directly correlative to the refusal to vaccinate because of the effects of the anti-vaccine movement that presents vaccines as unsafe despite significant evidence to the contrary.³⁴ Science denialism takes a number of forms, particularly in undermining legitimate health treatments and replacing them with unproven and unsound “alternative medicine,” which has become especially deadly when it comes to the refusal to undergo treatments for cancer or “AIDs denialism.”³⁵ This growing world of anti-science medical decision making is creating a public health crisis along a number of axis, and exists both on the left and the right as people try to come to terms with the very real problems presented by the American healthcare system. The anti-science movement, such as in AIDS denialism, do not provide viable alternatives to the American healthcare system, but instead simply obscure the actual problems in the healthcare system and what we can do about them. Instead of seeing systemic inequality in how healthcare and social services are administered, the cause for the proliferation of HIV or Measles is a complex nefarious actor, and that blame shift obscures how to solve the problem. Conspiracy theories tend to have a viral effect, so when an individual accepts a conspiracy narrative on one particular issue, they tend to become more receptive to conspiracy thinking on other issues, making anti-science conspiracy theories a particularly common pattern for those accepting conspiratorial narratives about state power.³⁶

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³⁴ Varun K. Phadke, MD, Robert A. Bednarczyk, MS, PhD, Daniel A. Salmon, MPH, PhD, and Saad B. Omer, MBBS, MPH, PhD. “Association Between Vaccine Refusal and Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in the United States: A Review of Measles and Pertussis.” *JAMA* vol. 315,11 (2016): 1149-58. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.1353.

³⁵ Didier Fassin. “The Politics of Conspiracy Theories: On AIDS in South Africa and a Few Other Global Plots.” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2011): 39-50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590791>.

³⁶ Anna Merlan, *Republic of Lies: American Conspiracy Theorists and Their Surprising Rise to Power* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019), 241-250.

What the conspiracy theory framework also does is allows the perpetuation of antisemitism by maintaining the ideological narrative framework that is necessary for antisemitism to exist. Antisemitic narratives created the structure of the modern conspiracy theories, and for antisemitic ideas to persist that framework has to be used to reinterpret events and apply meaning to them. The conspiracy theory then kept that framework alive even past its original antisemitic intent, meaning that when people are again exposed to antisemitic ideas they can simply slot these figures into the well-crafted conspiracy narrative they are well acquainted with. For this reason, even when people are exposed to a conspiracy theory that is not explicitly antisemitic, it leaves them more easily prone to antisemitic thinking in the future since that framework has now been integrated into the way they make sense of the world.

PATRIOTS

In the final case study of the book, the authors move into the 2016 Malheur Standoff where patriot militias, led by the Bundy ranching family, supported two Oregon ranchers who were ordered to return to federal prison for arson. The standoff was the second after the Bundy's own standoff in Nevada with federal law enforcement over a dispute ostensibly about grazing fees, but more substantially about the role of the federal government over public land and the way that a radical right grassroots movement was cultivated as a response to the economic deprivation of rural America.³⁷

The issue with public land is a large motivator for the "wise use" movement that opposes the nationalization of land by the Bureau of Land Management and wants to see it turned over to local authorities so that it can be exploited by extractive industries.³⁸ Using settler colonialist narratives about "traditional" living, they have fought back against federal environmental efforts by painting federal control of lands as tyrannical and conservationism as a scam.³⁹ The patriot militia movement, which traces its history back to the white supremacist Posse Comitatus movement of the 1970s, sees itself in opposition to a tyrannical federal government that is acting in opposition to the interests of the people, which is protected by

³⁷ John Temple, *Up in Arms: How the Bundy Family Hijacked Public Lands, Outfoxed the Federal Government, and Ignited America's Patriot Militia Movement* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2019).

³⁸ Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep* (Chico: AK Press, 2017), XX.

³⁹ Lorelei Hanson. "Turning Rivals into Allies: Understanding the Wise Use Movement." *Alternatives* 21, no. 3 (1995): 26-31. www.jstor.org/stable/45031684.

entrepreneurship, regional authorities, and strictly observed federalism.

Posse Comitatus evolved alongside the radicalization of American racist movements, which may seem redundant but represents a unique synthesis. The KKK, while intensely racist, was not owed to the same degree of antisemitic conspiracy theories that the neo-Nazi movements had post-WWII, and it wasn't until David Duke "Nazified" that Fourth Era Klan in the 1970s that it took on the level of antisemitism you would see in today's KKK organizations.⁴⁰ Posse Comitatus built on the increasingly antisemitic world views that were foundational to the burgeoning Christian Identity religion that saw Biblical eschatology and millenarianism as an explicitly racial apocalypse. It was in this period that antisemitism was forged as the central ideological explanation of the problems Posse Comitatus found in the current system, whereby Jews (Zionist Occupation Government) controlled the federal government and financial systems, perverting them from their previously positive nature and using them to destroy true Americans.⁴¹

Over the years Posse Comitatus faded, Christian Identity was further marginalized because of its radical beliefs and its connections to terrorism and organized crime, but the movement that they helped birth continued in the various stages of the Patriot, militia, and rural armed libertarian movements. Within those movements, particularly the ones that exist today, the conspiracy framework continued, while the explicit antisemitism was removed. Chip Berlet and Spencer Sunshine have labeled this "rural consciousness" as bound together with this producer/parasite binary and with multiple strains of ideological radicalization, and while racism and xenophobia undershirt the acceptance of these narratives, those racialized narratives have extended far beyond their white supremacist foundations and now affect populist discourses even in communities of color. Antisemitic narratives, which are essential to far-right populist and fascist movements, are also present in the underlying mythologies that these patriot militia communities offer about the government.⁴² When it comes to the antisemitic conspiracy narratives, more vague explanations are used for how and why the federal government was "captured," with those responsible ranging from bankers to "globalists." The names have changed, but the ideological infrastructure

⁴⁰ "David Duke," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-duke>.

⁴¹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, XX.

⁴² Chip Berlet & Spencer Sunshine (2019) Rural rage: the roots of right-wing populism in the United States, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 46:3, 480-513, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2019.1572603.

has remained. Today it is clear that the defining ideological motivator is the "ardent belief in the need to protect individual rights from encroachment by the federal government" and the perception of encroachment, responsibility, and culpability for institutional oppression and violence is informed by the earlier antisemitic script.⁴³

This, along with the millennial eschatology of many of the intersecting fringe interpretations of Christianity that permeated these areas (i.e. radical traditionalist Catholics or heretical versions of Mormonism) helped to create a consistent strain of radicalization, as well as create the ideological justification for the increasing hostility about the role of the federal government in overseeing public lands. Various ideologies based on the fundamental illegitimacy of the government increased and justified everything from protests over grazing rights to acts of terrorism.

Cliven Bundy was the spear's tip of this long history, incorporating radical Mormon eschatology into a confusing mix of "sovereign citizen" ideas resting on settler colonialist entitlements to the "land" as a pseudo-mystical, transhistorical concept.⁴⁴ His belief in the illegitimacy of federal land control led to him to refuse to pay grazing fees that he is required for his ranch's cattle to graze on federally owned land in Nevada. This led to the BLM essentially holding the cattle as payment for hundreds of thousands in unpaid fees, a conflict that was predetermined by Bundy's act of protest (the refusal to pay the fees). This moment was then used as a point to contest the Constitutional authority of federal land use protocols, and the BLM in particular, in a standoff that was widely supported by the patriot and militia movements and brought hundreds to Bundyville to face off with federal authorities. With guns trained on officers, the federal government backed down and handed back the cattle, effectively emboldening Bundy's ideology and entourage and encouraging an escalation of armed attacks on federal officials.⁴⁵

This led them to Harney County, a small rural area in Southern Oregon with just over 7,000 residents that, like Nevada, had a large proportion of federal land. Dwight and Steven Hammond were two ranchers that, like the Bundys, had a long history of antagonism with federal authorities, and

⁴³ Polesky, Joelle E. "The Rise of Private Militia: A First and Second Amendment Analysis of the Right to Organize and the Right to Train." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 144, no. 4 (1996): 1593-3.

⁴⁴ Kyle Boggs, "The rhetorical landscapes of the 'alt right' and the patriot movement: Settler entitlement to the land," in *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, Ed. Bernhard Forchtnerer (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 393-399.

⁴⁵ Temple, *Up in Arms*.

were eventually convicted of arson for setting a brush fire on federal land. They were sentenced below the legal minimums, and after they served their sentences and were back at home the prosecutors appealed the sentence and they were ordered back to federal prison to serve out a much longer stay. The Bundys led a caravan down to Harney County, and despite a lack of participation from the Hammonds and support from the people of the county, led an occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge for 41 days. This resulted in arrests (though failed prosecutions), the desecration of sacred Paiute tribal land, and the death of rancher-turned-patriot LaVoy Finicum in an altercation with law enforcement.⁴⁶ The driving narrative of the Bundy campaigns, both in Nevada and in Oregon, was a conspiratorial vision of federal overreach in the form of land management, despite what Patriot groups (and many right-wing politicians) argue is a clear Constitutional prohibition on this. This narrative rests on a number of assumptions about the motivations of the federal government, ranging from a desire to exploit the hard working “producers” to a more sinister cabal of controlling interests. This conspiracy of government malfeasance rarely has any statistical or factual corollaries, which is to say that the malicious behavior and oppression is rarely proven to exist in any meaningful way.

During the same period there were a number of profound episodes of *actual* government malfeasance, the cause of which is the state’s facilitation of the interests of capital in ways that, while echoing some of the anti-elitist claims of the Patriot movement, are both verifiable and explained by a leftist framework that understands late capitalism and white supremacy. The Flint water crisis, where the source of drinking water was switched in Flint Michigan to the heavily polluted Flint River has resulted in 12 deaths, severe cognitive injuries and health problems comparable to an epidemic, and safe water is still elusive for the region. 2014 also saw the growth of the campaign at Standing Rock to resist a dangerous oil pipeline that traced through sovereign indigenous land. Oil companies were supported by state actors as law enforcement attacked protesters in an incredibly brutal fashion, particularly when compared with the light touch at Bundyville. This is part of an ongoing systemic state of violence against people of color, particularly through extra-judicial police violence

⁴⁶ Part of their lack of support came from the way that public land was administered in the county and the presence of federal public employees undermined the narratives presented by the militias. Peter Walker. *Sagebrush Collaboration: How Harney County Defeated the Takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2018).

and mass incarceration, which led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement. These are all verifiable and explainable acts of governmental misbehavior that has resulted in quantifiable injury, which can then be compared to the abstractions offered to the Patriot movement about the harm and intentions behind federal land ownership.

The story of No DAPL or Black Lives Matter have a cogent political analysis behind them, one that puts the state in proper context. Systemic racism plays into policing, police structures perpetuate inequalities, militarized policing inspires escalated acts of violence, and so on. Likewise, Standing Rock exists at the intersection of the energy market's power, the state's role in facilitating market monopolies and extractive industries, and the ongoing legacy of colonialism. When it comes to the patriot narratives about how and why federal land ownership is a problem, there is no verifiable claim that rests on empirical data, long-standing structural analysis, or social movements with common narrative understandings of the issue. Instead, the problematic behavior in patriot narratives is less verifiable and is instead merely assumed, believed, or suspected, and that is enough for participants to construct a narrative of oppression. The unverified claim, the belief that malfeasance is taking place based on rumor rather than study and history, is at the foundation of the conspiracy theory, a construct that puts matter and meaning behind unverifiable claims. It requires a radically different value see to believe ranchers and farmers are exploited by the government, while people of color are not.

Antisemitism is central to this thought process, one that refuses to see the source of power in the verifiable and instead rests on the irrational. Antisemitism acts as a form of unverified mythology, a belief held closely because of its narrative power rather than its evidentiary presentation. Antisemitism is one of the oldest and most enduring forms of narrative explanation, a story that is told to explain "all bad things" that an institution, or confederation of institutions, does, not out of a structural analysis, but by a suspicion of motivation and particularity of agency. For the conspiracy theory, it is the *who* rather than the what, how or why that take predominance, and the resulting behavior is less important than the perception that there is nefariousness that remains unseen.

To properly confront this dynamic we have to unpack the narratives we use about enemy agents, replace conjecture with verifiable facts, and refuse to participate in the wild speculation that relies on antisemitic narratives that underskirt these lines of thinking.

DERACIALIZING OUR CRITIQUES

What *Producers, Parasites, Patriots* does is to deconstruct the narrative structure of the nationalist populist trend, a profound task given the dramatic rise of movements in Europe (Alternative for Germany, Austrian Freedom Party, Front National, Brexit), in India (BJP), in South America (Anti-indigenous and anti-socialist movements in Bolivia, Alliance for Brazil), and various other parts of the world. The book focuses on a really broad form of white supremacy, centered on anti-blackness, whereby certain classes of workers are separated from others using a narrative of parasitical behavior. This ideology was developed explicitly to forge strong white identity against black sovereignty and destroy cross-racial solidarity, but even as the narrative moved away from explicit anti-blackness it maintained the same structure that sought to split the working class when it was advantageous to whoever was holding the rhetorical hammer.

The same model of ideological construction is taking place in the interplay between antisemitism and conspiracy theory, as the model for conspiratorial critiques of power (that individuals/groups have corrupted a system rather than the system being suspect as a whole) has continued antisemitic narrative structures even when Jews are not consciously identified. This is not the main focus of their book, but *Producers, Parasites, Patriots* offers a conceptual framework even beyond its key analytical focus.

There is a language war that plays out in social movements, both to clarify direction and to close ranks against infiltration from ideological opponents. If the left means to go after the inequalities embedded in capitalism, and orchestrated by moneyed classes, then it does so because inequality is in and of itself a motivating problem. Within that framework, using antisemitic devices, which can further marginalize Jews, creates a problem for meeting that higher goal, and creates an ineffective strategy since it confuses who has actual agency in the problem. Lowndes and HoSang identify the intentionality with which narratives of anti-blackness were applied to broad sectors of the contemporary working class, particularly unionized workers in the public sector, as a way of dividing popular support for labor. This is the long story of white supremacy, the way it has been employed to buy out white workers and distort the kind of bonds necessary to create truly liberatory movements. The same is true in the murky world of antisemitism, where conspiracy theory is stoked as a shield for those embedded in power, and the only way to break through that smoke screen is to consciously attack this narrative construct whenever it emerges.

Book Review: Patrick Hermansson, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simond Burdoc, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*. London: Routledge: Fascism and Far Right Series, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1138363861 (paperback). 276 Pages. \$25.95.

Reviewed by Shane Burley

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When the term Alt Right arrived into the popular lexicon in 2015, it sent journalists and pundits into a scramble to define it, partially because of the undo electoral influence that was ascribed to it. “What I’m trying to do is explain this weird Internet movement that no one has heard of but now may be poised to sway a presidential election,” one reporter told me in an early interview I did on the Alt Right, and we spent four hours on the phone talking through the ins and outs of the movement. The Alt Right had actually become a nearly dead term by early 2015, and the originators of the movement, people like Richard Spencer, had moved on from Alternative Right as a nomenclature to “identitarian.” This is what fascist anti-immigrant youth activists call themselves in Europe, France in particular, in a movement inspired by the European New Right (ENR), which is what had inspired the Alternative Right to form in the U.S.

First, Cuckservative, a racially loaded term for conservative politicians who the far-right say work “against their own interest” on immigration, became popular. This gave the far-right the energy to push the term Alt Right back into popular usage because of the clever promotional work of a series of vulgar white nationalist blogs and message boards. This second generation network of white nationalists had started using the term, shortened Alternative to Alt, as a broad catch all, just the way Spencer had in 2010. Spencer decided to let the fates decide, returned to using the term, and the second hashtag to hit Twitter “trending” status from their movement was #AltRight. This was before Donald Trump’s elevator speech.

So in this corridor of time a series of books were planned to explain a movement that was so confusing, that was the main focus of a Hilary Clinton speech and was seemingly everywhere. The “what” was actually less important, this was just white nationalism rebranded, but the why, how, and who, actually was what was important to understand. How did a large white nationalist mass movement form in the U.S. seemingly all at once with almost no one watching?

There is a cottage industry of books, monographs, and lengthy signature articles explaining what the Alt Right is, some better than others, and many missing a lot of context and detail. One of the difficulties of these books is simply the material realities of the publishing industry: you have to get your books out quickly to stay timely. Some people were well advantaged to do this because they had already been heavily soaked in research on the movement from earlier projects. George Hawley’s *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, and the following *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Need to Know*, had this advantage, since he had just spent years researching his 2016 opus *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*. Other books did well to focus on particular aspects of the movement, such as Thomas J. Main’s *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, which highlighted the paleoconservative roots of the Alt Right (it is only one of their roots) and go deep into the work of James Burnham and, subsequently, Sam Francis. *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate* by Alexandra Minna Stern came much later, and focused heavily on the ideologies themselves with the kind of clarity that only comes when you slow down and don’t mind that you are coming late in the pack.

This was the advantage of the new book by Patrick Hermansson, David Klawrence, Joe Mulhall and Simon Murdoch, researchers with the London based antifascist non-profit Hope Not Hate. Their book, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*, released by the groundbreaking Fascism and Far-Right series from Routledge, follows in this line, being released years after some of the other titles looking to explain the Alt Right, and it gained its edge from doing so. The authors have spent years working on the Alt Right at this point, writing articles, books, and releasing film projects, all meant to cut to the heart of the movement. This is not for vague intellectualism, but for a purpose: their organization is dedicated to ending the influence of hate groups and fighting for a more equal world.

The International Alt-Right is, to a degree, the culmination of their work, drawing together all of their research and publishing into one large tome that addresses all aspects of the Alt Right. This is, to date, the most complete book that has ever been written about the Alt Right, going deep

into their world and highlighting the international nature of their connections and growth. The volume is certainly more dense than other books on the subject, and this is the advantage of an academic publisher since they know their audience will be more forgiving of incredibly detailed writing that highlights dependable research over biting narrative prose.

One of the interesting starting points for the book is that it shares its definition of the Alt Right with *Alt-Right: From 4Chan to the White House*, a volume I am less inclined to agree with.

We define the International “Alternative Right” as an international set of groups and individuals, operating primarily online though with offline outlets, whose core belief is that “white identity” is under attack from pro-multicultural and liberal elites and co-called “social justice warriors” (SJWs) who allegedly use “political correctness” to undermine Western civilisation and the rights of white males. Put simply, the “Alternative Right” is a far right, anti-globalist grouping that offers a radical “alternative” to traditional/establishment conservatism. (Pg. 2)

This is not how I would define the Alt Right, primarily because when I began researching the Alt Right closer to the foundation of AlternativeRight.com, that is not how the movement was defined. Instead it was defined as a dissident movement that was united by the essential role of identity and human inequality (from which I subsequently developed a definition of generic fascism), and this particular narrative was only a piece of it. The “anti-globalist” piece was particularly recent in its application since globalism is a pseudo-intellectual term used by the blogosphere to describe the behavior of “elites” rather than a proper ideological construct. The early Alt Right was quite “globalist” in its use of international relationships to develop a broad based racial nationalism as opposed to regional ethnic or civic nationalisms. Even the term SJW came later, not until the “Alt Right 2.0” of 2015.

But there is something well placed about this definition as you go through the book because it is a reminder that a movement is not defined just by what its leaders originally intended for it to be, but by what it evolves into from a mass of people participating. So many books and authors have focused on what I define as “Alt Right 2.0,” the second wave of the Alt Right that emerged from the podcasts, blogs, and message boards in 2015. They took the original academic tone of the Alternative Right, shortened it to memes and mean jokes, and fired it back as Alt

Right. In this way they were more mission driven, less focused on developing an intellectual meta-politic and more focused on influencing behaviors, so how we define the movement also had to evolve. My particular definitions had not evolved in that time, and maybe they should have since the Alt Right had changed handily in five years.

The International Alt-Right does not have to sacrifice lengthy discussions of ideology for research on tech or for details on international relationships in its discussion since it has room for all of it. It is a hefty book that is tightly written with a heavy focus on research, especially on Alt Right primary sources, so you will find a lot here. All aspects of the Alt Right are covered, from the pseudo-scientific race research to anti-Semitism to several chapters both on the online features of the movement and its relationship to the manosphere. This is not just rehashing what we know, there is a lot of unique and less discussed research here, particularly in the manosphere, international corollaries to the movement in places like Japan, and one of the best histories of the Dark Enlightenment ever published. There are parts that feel a bit short, such as the discussions of Human Biological Diversity, but that is only because they are just one piece of the entire book (it is a reminder that there still needs to be more published on that wing of the movement). All of it was a pleasure to read, none of it felt unnecessarily obtuse or dripping in academic jargon. The authors clearly wanted to make the book of use to the reader.

This is actually the hallmark of the Fascism and Far Right series, books written with the density of research expected in academic literature, but with quality writing that might come from popular publishers. Series editors Graham Macklin, Nigel Copsey, and Craig Fowler have sought to make the series incredibly vibrant during the explosive return of the far-right to the world stage, and have been unmistakably partisan in doing so: they see the threat that fascist movements offer and know why they should be stopped. This is the same mission that the authors of *The International Alt-Right* come from, an organization that is internationally renowned for taking a stand against the violence of nationalism.

The book takes its time to really unpack all the seemingly disparate parts of a movement that evolved quickly, sometimes faster than its leadership could respond to, and has left a mark on the American political spectrum. One interesting thing about the book is the framing of the Alt Right as “international” despite the vast majority of the text focusing on the U.S. This may be simply a shift in terms since the Alt Right is part of a larger identitarian wave in politics, and can be considered the American corollary of European and Eurasian movements. The section on international movements is quite impressive, particularly in what is accomplished in the

chapter on mysticism and Indian Hindutva connections, but there could likely have been more chapters on the international connections. This is especially true of Bloc identitaire and other French anti-immigrant movements, but it could simply have been that so much has been written on that subject at this point that there is little reason to rehash secondary sources.

The International Alt-Right should be the go-to source for researchers and writers looking to have a foundational resource on the movement, and is among the best books ever written on the movement (the other highest recommendation goes to *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*). This is a reminder that it is often best to turn to people who have been doing the work on these movements for years, such as organizations like Hope Not Hate, rather than just researchers or journalists who are covering it just for the moment. There is a particular depth and reliability that comes when a group of researchers have made it their life's work to understand a subject, and, in this case, to oppose the right. There is an added advantage of refusing to rush out a book (this came out in 2020) and building on years of previous research. You end up with a volume that will outlast its release, that people will go to for years, and would be useful to expand in later editions as the movement heads into 3.0, 4.0, and 5.0 phases.